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Security Council

Seventy-third year

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Monday, 16 April 2018, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Meza-Cuadra	(Peru)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Ms. Cardona Moscoso
	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren
	Poland	Mr. Radomski
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	Sweden	Ms. Bah Kuhnke
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Ms. Eckels-Currie

Agenda

Women and peace and security

Preventing sexual violence in conflict through empowerment, gender equality and access to justice

Report of the Secretary-General on conflictrelated sexual violence (S/2018/250)

Letter dated 2 April 2018 from the Permanent Representative of Peru to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2018/311)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Women and peace and security

Preventing sexual violence in conflict through empowerment, gender equality and access to justice

Report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence (S/2018/250)

Letter dated 2 April 2018 from the Permanent Representative of Peru to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2018/311)

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Argentina, Austria, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belgium, Botswana, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Egypt, Estonia, Germany, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Mexico, Montenegro, Myanmar, Namibia, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Paraguay, Portugal, Qatar, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, the Sudan, Switzerland, the Syrian Arab Republic, Turkey, Ukraine, the United Arab Emirates and Uruguay to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Ms. Pramila Patten, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, and Ms. Razia Sultana, Senior Researcher of Kaladan Press.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I also invite the following to participate in this meeting: Mr. Gerton van den Akker, Chargé d'affaires ad interim of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations; Ms. Fatima Kyari Mohammed, Permanent Observer of the African Union to the United Nations; and Ms. Clare Hutchinson, Special Representative for Women, Peace and Security of the Secretary-General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

I propose that the Council invite the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of the Holy See to the United Nations to participate in the meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/250, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence.

I also wish to also draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/311, which contains the text of a letter dated 2 April 2018 from the Permanent Representative of Peru to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, transmitting a concept note on the item under consideration.

I wish to warmly welcome Her Excellency Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed, to whom I now give the floor.

The Deputy Secretary-General: Let me begin by commanding Peru and His Excellency Ambassador Gustavo Meza-Cuadra for convening this important open debate on sexual violence and conflict. I also very warmly welcome Ms. Razia Sultana here today to amplify the voices of the Rohingya community and to offer an account to the plight of women and girls systematically targeted due to their religion or ethnicity.

This year in Myanmar, and in many other conflict situations, the widespread threat and use the sexual violence is once again being used as a tactic to advance military, economic and ideological objectives. Once again it has been a driver of massive forced displacement. Let me be clear: both genders endure the horrific brutality of sexual violence in conflict. Sexual violence is also a very common method of torture of detainees, and in many conflicts most detainees are men and boys. But overall women and girls are disproportionately affected. Gender-based discrimination is the invisible driver of most crimes of sexual violence. The lower one's status in terms of wealth, health and education, the greater her vulnerability and exposure to harm.

Last year, I travelled with Special Representative of the Secretary-General Pramila Patten to Nigeria and to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In both nations, the consequences of sexual violence are profound and enduring for survivors, their families and their communities. Survivors are forced to live with the untreated physical and psychological trauma, the social stigma and unwanted pregnancies. The children born of rape are often ostracized and relegated to the margins of society. That serves yet again to highlight the fact that, in the end, sexual violence has consequences for all affected women, girls, men and boys. It is a deliberate tactic to humiliate and disempower and undermine social cohesion. Our responsibility must be to bring justice, recognition and reparations to the survivors of those horrendous crimes — not only justice in the courtroom but also social justice and economic empowerment.

We should recognize and support the resilience of the many survivors who are working as agents of change. If we are to prevent these crimes being repeated, we must ensure accountability and deterrence. In that context, I welcome the continued engagement by those parties listed by the Secretary-General in his reports on conflict-related sexual violence. For example, the signing of a unilateral communiqué by a coalition of armed groups in Mali in July 2017 and the development of a joint communiqué implementation plan by the Iraq Government last month are both very encouraging.

Let me also highlight the increased vigilance being shown by peacekeepers in protecting women, girls, men and boys from sexual violence as part of their protection-of-civilians mandate. Last month in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo, a female engagement team of 16 soldiers from the United Kingdom, South Africa and Nepal supported a civilian mission to one of the country's most remote areas in response to reports of abductions and sexual violence inflicted on hundreds of civilians. This shows the value of alert networks and the importance of women in peacekeeping to better address conflict-related sexual violence.

Women's protection advisers deployed to United Nations peace operations also have a leading role to play in supporting Government counterparts in implementing their commitments. Those commitments include engaging all parties to the conflict to prevent sexual violence and ensuring that survivors and civil society organizations can voice their concerns about security, protection and limitations in service provision and that they can help shape inclusive new policies and laws.

Resolution 2106 (2013) calls on all actors — the Security Council, parties to armed conflict, Member States and United Nations entities — to do much more to combat impunity for those crimes. Let us intensify our efforts to end the horrific litany of sexual violence in conflict so that our women, girls, men and boys have no less burden to bear as they work to rebuild their shattered lives.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the Deputy Secretary-General for her very informative briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Patten.

Ms. Patten: I am delighted to join the Council today for the first open debate on sexual violence in conflict during my tenure as Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. Allow me to start by expressing my appreciation to Peru for presiding over this meeting and for its leadership on the women and peace and security agenda.

The focus of this debate, on preventing sexual violence in conflict through empowerment, gender equality and access to justice, could not be more timely or more in line with my own vision for advancing this mandate. When I took up office last June, I outlined a three-pillar priority agenda, namely, converting cultures of impunity into cultures of deterrence through consistent and effective prosecution; addressing structural, gender-based inequality as the root cause and invisible driver of sexual violence in times of war and peace; and fostering national ownership and leadership for a sustainable, survivor-centered response that empowers civil society and local women's rights defenders.

Another important first is the participation in today's debate of Ms. Razia Sultana, on behalf of the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security. Ms. Sultana is the first Rohingya woman, born in northern Rakhine state, Myanmar, to brief the Council on the plight of her people. Her presence here is a historic opportunity to give a face and a voice to a community that has been denied a nationality, denied an identity, and even denied a name. Her perspective will be particularly valuable on the eve of the Council's first visit to Myanmar and Bangladesh. Indeed, voices from directly affected communities provide the ground truths that must guide our action, and I trust that her message will be heard and heeded.

The annual open debate on sexual violence in conflict provides a critical opportunity for taking stock of how we are progressing, or regressing, in this agenda. The data and trend analysis presented in the annual report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/250) serves not only to measure progress but also to inspire and accelerate it. It was exactly one decade ago, in 2008, that the Council adopted the ground-breaking resolution 1820 (2008), which elevated the issue of conflict- related sexual violence onto its agenda as a threat to security and an impediment to peace. It urged us to debunk the myths that fuel sexual violence, and indeed the notion of rape as an inevitable by-product of war or mere collateral damage can never again serve as an alibi for inaction.

Since then, the issue has been systematically included in the mandates of peacekeeping missions, reflected in the designation criteria of sanctions regimes, addressed in ceasefire agreements and excluded from amnesty provisions. Women's protection advisers have been deployed to field missions to generate actionable information and pursue a protection dialogue with parties to conflict. Today, we are supporting thousands of survivors we were not reaching a decade ago. Resolution 1820 (2008) demanded nothing less than the immediate and complete cessation by all parties to armed conflict of all acts of sexual violence against civilians. In that respect, while significant normative and operational progress has been achieved, it is clear that words on paper are not yet matched by facts on the ground. We have not yet moved from resolutions to lasting solutions.

I believe that we are at an inflection point in this agenda and must urgently consolidate progress by ensuring accountability or risk a reversal resulting in wartime rape being once again normalized due to the frequency and impunity with which it is committed. The past decade of enhanced political momentum to combat sexual violence has coincided with a confluence of global crises, including mass migration and displacement, rising violent extremism and terrorism, the resurgence and spread of conflict, and the proliferation of arms.

These factors have created the conditions for renewed patterns of violations. Indeed, the report before us shows that in 2017 sexual violence continued to be employed as a tactic of war, a tactic of terrorism and a tool of political repression. Across a range of settings, it was used by parties to conflict to attack and alter the ethnic or religious identity of persecuted groups and to change the very demographics of disputed regions. The threat of sexual violence continued to serve as a driver of forced displacement, and has inhibited the return of uprooted communities to their areas of origin, especially in the absence of accountability for past crimes. In this way, conflict-related sexual violence has led to the dispossession of land, resources and identity.

The trafficking of women and girls for the purpose of sexual exploitation continued to be an integral part of the political economy of war and terrorism, generating revenue for combatants and armed groups. Women and girls have also been gifted to combatants as part of a perverse system of rewarding and socializing recruits. A rising trend noted in the report is the recourse to negative and harmful coping mechanisms in response to the risk of rape in environments of instability and indigence. Early marriage has spiked in contexts where families have no other means of providing for or safeguarding their daughters. This has resulted in more repression, in the name of protection. Indeed, sexual violence both arises from and reinforces unequal gender relations, impeding the realization of women's rights and freedoms.

In several contexts, victims have been forced to marry their rapist in the name of restoring social harmony and family honour. Survivors have endured multiple, intersecting stigmas in the wake of sexual violence, including the stigma of association with an armed or terrorist group and of bearing children conceived through rape by the enemy. Often, these women and children are viewed as affiliates rather than as victims of violent extremist groups, and vilified as threats to the communities they seek to rejoin. The divisive force of stigma prevents family reconciliation, in some cases leading to renewed displacement, with survivors fleeing to escape reprisals by their own relatives or communities. Stigma can have lethal repercussions, including honour killings, suicide, untreated diseases — such as HIV and traumatic fistula — unsafe abortion, maternal mortality, extreme poverty and high-risk survival behaviour. Stigma and victim-blame give the weapon of rape its uniquely destructive power, including the power to shred the social fabric and turn victims into outcasts. It is also the reason that sexual violence remains one of the least reported of all crimes.

The plight of children conceived as a result of wartime rape demands urgent attention. These children may be left stateless, in a legal limbo, and susceptible to recruitment, radicalization, trafficking and exploitation, with wider implications for peace and security. Colombia is the only country in which children conceived through rape are legally recognized as victims, al though the fear of stigma has prevented many from coming forward to seek redress.

Male survivors of sexual violence have had their social status, identity and sexual orientation called into question. In some countries, that can even result in their arrest. Despite some landmark cases, such as the International Criminal Court ruling in the trial of Bosco Ntaganda in 2017, mass rape continues to be met with mass impunity. That means that the vicious cycle of violence, impunity and revenge continues unabated in many nations torn apart by war. For instance, it is a travesty and an outrage that not a single member of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) or Boko Haram has yet been convicted for sexual violence as an international crime.

Although the report before us paints a bleak, at times harrowing, picture of brutality, it is also important to highlight the progress achieved at the country level. For instance, the Forces armées nationales de Côte d'Ivoire were delisted last year, following the adoption of concrete action plans and concerted efforts to prevent and punish sexual violence. No new cases or allegations concerning members of the Ivorian armed and security forces were recorded in 2017, which shows what is possible when political will and risk-mitigation measures are in place.

Several other States continue to implement joint communiqués and action plans to curb conflict-related sexual violence, such as the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea, Iraq, Somalia and South Sudan. I look forward to other parties that appear in the list, such as the Myanmar armed forces and the Sudanese armed forces, adopting similar communiqués or frameworks of cooperation with my Office. Another instructive example is that of Colombia, which elevated gender justice to the heart of its peace process, resulting in thousands of survivors receiving reparations for sexual violence.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a former parliamentarian in Kavumu, South Kivu province, was convicted in 2017 for the rapes of 39 young children committed by his militia, as a crime against humanity. That trial brought an end to the serial rapes in Kavumu, and helped to disband a militia that was threatening local security. In addition, hundreds of prosecutions have been undertaken by the Congolese authorities, with support from the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict, which is part of my Office. A number of significant law reform initiatives also took place in 2017 to delink rape from adultery and morality crimes, as seen in Afghanistan, Somalia and the Sudan.

The history of wartime rape has been a history of denial. On my visits to countries of concern, I still encounter attempts to deny or downplay this issue. Yet such an approach serves no one — not the Government, not the credibility and efficacy of national institutions and not the people trying to come to terms with the past and build a better future. No problem can be solved through silence. We will never be able to prevent what we are unable, or unwilling, to understand.

At this critical juncture, we cannot lose focus. We must keep the searchlight of international scrutiny on this historically hidden crime. When I think of what is at stake, I think of the thousands of women and children who remain in the captivity of groups like ISIL and Boko Haram. I think of the women released — pregnant or with children — from the grip of a terrorist group, who are forced to choose between their babies and their communities of origin that refuse to accept them. I think of the faces of the survivors I have met in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Darfur, Nigeria and Guinea and in the teeming camps in Bangladesh. I think of the Bosnian man who reduced the room to tears by describing his struggle for identity and belonging, having been born of wartime rape and orphaned by prejudice and stigma. If the Security Council resolutions on sexual violence tell us one thing it is that wartime rape is preventable, not inevitable. Addressing it is our collective responsibility. The survivors are watching and waiting. We cannot afford to fail them. Looking forward, I would like to propose three recommendations.

First, I call on the international community to give serious consideration to the establishment of a reparations fund for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, to help them rebuild their lives and livelihoods. Reparative justice is what survivors want most, yet receive least.

Secondly, we need a more operational response to stigma alleviation, because stigma kills. Socioeconomic reintegration support for sexual violence survivors and their children must infuse peacebuilding, reconstruction and reconciliation efforts. In cases where survivors face ongoing risks, I encourage States to adopt special quota projects to help relocate women and children to third countries, following the precedent set by Germany to protect members of the Iraqi Yazidi community. Similar consideration should be given to the most vulnerable Rohingya women and children.

Thirdly, we need to marshal sustained political resolve and resources equal to the scale of the challenge. The gender-based violence response in humanitarian settings remains chronically underfunded. Time and time again, we see how a lack of resources translates into a lack of protection. The report before us should serve as an alarm and a wake-up call to the onset of any donor fatigue.

Despite all the challenges, what gives me hope is the way that women — from Liberia, Colombia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and elsewhere — have used their experience as survivors of sexual violence to mobilize political movements for peace. They have become galvanized and organized in response to that threat, and have begun to channel that impetus into political aspirations to ensure that the dark chapters of their nation's history never repeat. We must support these efforts to enhance women's participation and influence because, after all, empowerment is protection.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Ms. Patten for her very informative briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Sultana.

Ms. Sultana: I am a Rohingya lawyer, researcher and educator who specializes in the trauma, mass rape and trafficking of Rohingya girls and women. I have been working directly with Rohingya women and girls in the refugee camps in Bangladesh since 2014. As a senior researcher, I have worked with Kalandan Press on a few reports. I am a coordinator of the Free Rohingya Coalition, Director of the women's section of the Arakan Rohingya National Organization and the founder of Rohingya Women Welfare. Today I speak on behalf of my people, who have been driven from our motherland. Where I come from, women and girls have been gang-raped, tortured and killed by the Myanmar army for no reason other than for being Rohingya. I also speak today on behalf of the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security.

Since August last year, more than 670,000 Rohingya have fled Myanmar. That is the fastest refugee movement since the Rwanda genocide. I am extremely grateful to Bangladesh for opening its borders. However, the international community, particularly the Security Council, has failed us. The most recent crisis could have been prevented if the warning signs since 2012 had not been ignored. Since that time, State security forces have committed human rights abuses against the Rohingya. Officials then placed severe restrictions on our freedom of movement, which limited access to a livelihood, health care, food and education. Discrimination against the Rohingya people dates to as far back as 1982, when we were stripped of our citizenship rights. Many of Myanmar's other ethnic minorities — including the Karen, Kachin, Chin, Hmong and Shan peoples — have also faced decades of entrenched discrimination, rape and other human rights violations owing to the military operating with impunity. Other ethnic women's groups in Myanmar have documented such patterns for decades. In 2002, the Shan groups released a report that described the same patterns of gang-rape, killing and mutilation. In 2014, the Women's League of Burma released a report that documented the rape of more than 100 ethnic women by the Myanmar army. That demonstrated how, even after the elections in 2010, the Myanmar army was still raping ethnic women with impunity. The same is happening now, only on a much larger scale.

My own research and interviews provide evidence that Government troops raped many more than 300 women and girls in 17 villages in Rakhine state. With more than 350 villages attacked and burned since August 2017, that number is probably only a fraction of the actual total number of women raped. Girls as young as six years of age were gang-raped. Women and girls were caught and gang-raped in their homes as they ran away or tried to cross the border into Bangladesh. Some were horribly mutilated and burned alive. The sexual violence involved hundreds of soldiers and occurred across a large part of Rakhine state. Such scale and breadth provide strong evidence that rape was systematically planned and used as a weapon against my people. The pattern of mutilation of women's private parts after rape suggests a specific directive to instil terror among the Rohingya people, as well as to destroy their very means of reproduction. With hundreds of thousands of troops deployed across Myanmar, it has horrifying implications for the safety of women and girls across the country.

There are similar situations around the world, such as in Syria and Yemen. More than 3 million women and girls are at risk of sexual and gender-based violence in Yemen. In Syria, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic found that sexual violence carried out by Government forces and militias formed part of the widespread and systematic attacks directed against the civilian population.

Rohingyas continue to flee today, and humanitarian organizations estimate that 60 per cent of the displaced Rohingya currently in Cox's Bazar, in Bangladesh, are women and girls. Had Bangladesh closed its borders, the situation would have been considerably worse. However, the international community and humanitarian agencies need to urgently scale up the health and protection services to support the Rohingya refugees. That must include unhindered access to life-saving health care services, mental and psychosocial care and improved conditions of sanitation, water and hygiene. Despite the acute need, post-rape care, including access to safe abortions and emergency contraception, is critically low in the camps. Women and girls with disabilities and the elderly face greater risks and needs, which are not being addressed. There must be a faster registration process for non-governmental organizations specialized in humanitarian sexual reproductive health care and in women's empowerment and protection programming.

My greatest concern is the increased incidents of young women being trafficked, some of whom are as young as 12 years old. Young women and girls either are kidnapped or are promised jobs or marriage offers and then disappear. Many see no future and are desperate to escape to a better life. They are easily trapped by false promises and then never seen again. There have also been cases of young teenage boys being abducted. I am working on an awareness campaign for parents and community leaders to provide their girls with a protected environment.

Young Rohingya women have a vital role to play in such awareness-raising and in coordinating humanitarian assistance in the camps. They should be encouraged to volunteer, as they will be trusted by their community to relay vital information and, at the same time, they will learn important leadership skills. Many young Rohingya women in the refugee camps want to help their people and to be actively involved in the future of their community. They need to be supported and provided with the necessary training to do so. It is time to empower our Rohingya women and girls with vision, respect and support in whatever way we can.

Later this month, the Security Council will visit the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar and continue on to Myanmar. During that visit, its members must meet women and girl survivors. I can facilitate safe meetings. They must work with the Bangladesh authorities to stop the trafficking, pressure the Myanmar Government and senior officials to cooperate with the United Nations independent international fact-finding mission on Myanmar and insist on unrestricted humanitarian access across Rakhine state.

The rule of law must drive the response to the Rohingya crisis. International pressure is urgently needed to end impunity in Myanmar and to support political and legal reform that ends the oppression of all ethnic peoples in Myanmar. Any return of refugees to Myanmar must be in accordance with international standards and must be safe, dignified and voluntary. As the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State recommended, and many members of the Council agreed, the Government of Myanmar must address the central questions of Rohingya citizenship, rights, freedom of movement and equality before the law. My people must be guaranteed their safety upon return to Myanmar. My people are not asking for citizenship; we want our right to citizenship back. My people must be guaranteed their safety upon return to Myanmar. My people must be guaranteed their safety upon return to Burma.

The Myanmar military is listed for the first time in this year's report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence (S/2018/250). In the light of that and the ongoing impunity of the army, the Security Council must refer the situation in Myanmar to the International Criminal Court without delay, for its horrific crimes against Rohingya as well as for violations against other ethnic groups in the country, including in the Shan, Karin, Kachin and other states. It is hypocritical to condemn the human rights violations and express horror at the new violence, while then also selling arms to Myanmar and seeking explorative licenses to mine its natural resources. Member States committed to conflict prevention and sustaining peace cannot turn a blind eye to State-sanctioned persecution of an ethnic minority, discrimination or other human rights violations, including sexual violence for trade. That applies to Myanmar and all crises elsewhere.

My statement today is not only for Rohingya women but for my other ethnic sisters who are also facing atrocities. Women community leaders from different ethnicities across Myanmar are working together to build inter-ethnic peace and community relations. We believe in a peaceful and united Myanmar for all ethnicities.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Ms. Sultana for her informative briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Ms. Bah Kuhnke (Sweden): I align myself with the statements to be delivered on behalf of the European Union, the Nordic countries and the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security.

Let me begin by thanking the Deputy Secretary-General, Ms. Amina Mohammed, and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Pramila Patten, for their thoughtful interventions this morning and for their leadership and concrete efforts to combat conflict-related sexual violence. I want to extend a particular word of welcome and thanks to Ms. Razia Sultana, whose testimony underlines the critical importance of using all the tools available to the Security Council to prevent and respond to conflict-related sexual violence.

In my position as the Swedish Minister for Culture and Democracy — with responsibilities such as national human rights, civil society and the fight against discrimination and racism — I have met women and girls, men and boys who are seeking asylum in Sweden, and I have listened to their testimonies. I have heard stories about children in conflict areas, taken from their families, abducted, forced into sexual slavery. Those are horrible atrocities. But it does not stop there. During their journey to Europe, they were once again abused and harassed, including in refugee camps. My role as Minister is to listen, to understand and — most important — to act. Those testimonies, like Ms. Sultana's, cannot only be something we here are horrified by; the stories must become the starting point for action.

Regrettably, violence, oppression and systematic subordination still mark the daily lives of countless women and girls. Conflict-related sexual violence brutalizes and traumatizes the victims and seeks to undermine and shatter communities and societies. Its impact cannot be overestimated. Addressing this scourge is a central part of the Security Council's work. Alarmingly, conflict-related sexual violence as a tactic of war and terrorism has reached new levels. That is a core security challenge. At the heart of this issue is the fundamental principle of women's full enjoyment of human rights, especially sexual and reproductive health and rights. The link between accountability and prevention is clear. Ensuring accountability and putting an end to impunity for violations and abuses against international law must be a priority for all of us, both inside and outside the Council.

When Sweden joined the Security Council, we set out two overarching priorities: conflict prevention and women and peace and security. Therefore, we thank Peru for organizing this open debate, and welcome the focus of today's discussion. Since 2014, Sweden has pursued a feminist foreign policy based on four R's — rights, representation, resources and reality check. That means that throughout our foreign policy — including peace, security, trade, humanitarian and development efforts — we are applying a systematic gender perspective. Without inclusion and respect for all, sustainable peace can never be achieved. We know that gender equality makes societies more peaceful. The ongoing Stockholm Forum on Gender Equality will cover many of these critical issues and seek common solutions.

The Council needs to address the gender dynamics of the root causes of conflict. We must consider structural gender inequality as a critical element of the instability that hinders efforts to maintain or restore international peace and security. To achieve that, we need gendered conflict analysis, while building on gender-disaggregated data and solid gender expertise. We also need to build alliances with brave civil society actors, who play an essential role in addressing conflict-related sexual violence and promoting gender equality. We fully support the Secretary-General's recommendation that the Council consider the early warning signs of sexual violence in its monitoring of conflict situations.

Last year, the Security Council added the first-ever separate designation criteria on conflict-related sexual violence in the sanctions regime for the Central African Republic. However, having the criteria is not enough; sanctions committees also need gender expertise. This year, when the Council renewed the sanctions regime for the Central African Republic, it added language to respond to this need. Let us work together to include similar criteria in all relevant sanctions regimes.

Panels of experts must also be mandated to report to the sanctions committees on conflict-related sexual violence. In cases where there are still no separate designation criteria, we encourage the panels to report under international humanitarian law and/or human rights criteria. To further inform country-specific considerations, we encourage Council members and the broader membership to make full use of the documents and the meetings of the Security Council Informal Expert Group on Women, Peace and Security.

The importance of women in peacekeeping no longer needs to be justified. The evidence speaks for itself. With more female peacekeepers and police officers, we can achieve more and reach the whole population in a conflict area. Sweden is actively addressing factors that hinder the deployment of women peacekeepers, police and corrections officers. The women and peace and security agenda is an integral part of predeployment training for all Swedish troops, and all deployed contingents have specially trained gender advisers. There are many good examples to be shared in that regard.

We welcome the enhanced focus on access to justice and its links to prevention, which contributes to ending impunity and to ensuring victims' trust in accountable and effective criminal-justice institutions. As the report of the Secretary-General contained in document S/2018/250 highlights, the effects of sexual violence — including trauma, stigma, poverty and poor health — can echo across generations. In response, we need to ensure socioeconomic-reintegration support to restore community cohesion. Survivors of sexual and gender-based violence also must have access to the full range of livelihood, legal, psychosocial and medical services, including sexual- and reproductive-health services that are not subject to donor restrictions.

The focus of today's open debate shows that it is a broad agenda with many interconnected goals and that no single actor can achieve them alone. That makes alliances — among States, regional and international organizations, civil society, women's organizations, inter alia — so important. We, the Security Council, need to show leadership — not just with regard to today's topic, but across all aspects of our work.

Ms. Eckels-Currie (United States of America): I thank Deputy Secretary-General Mohammed, Special Representative Patten and Ms. Sultana for their briefings today. The report of the Secretary-General on the rising levels of conflict-related sexual violence (S/2018/250) is chilling. We welcome the discussion today and hope that it serves as an impetus for the Security Council to take concrete steps to both ensure justice for survivors and help prevent these crimes from occurring. I thank the President for convening today's meeting.

We should all be appalled at the level of sexual violence taking place in conflicts around the world. In war zone after war zone, horrific violence against women is not an unfortunate by-product of conflict but a weapon of conflict. As the Secretary-General's report details, and as Ms. Sultana describes in horrible detail, in Burma, as we speak, the military is using sexual violence as a tool for ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya and for terrorizing other ethnic communities across the country with impunity. And what does that mean? It means using mass rape, sexual exploitation and sexual slavery of women and girls — girls as young as 12 or 13 — to drive groups of people out of their homes. It means using the terror, stigma and shame of rape to drive families from their country, often from the only place they have ever known. As the mother of a precious nine-year-old girl, I find the horror of these crimes unfathomable.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, sexual violence is a common tactic used by armed groups to punish and humiliate people allied with their enemies. Women and girls are the battlefield on which conflict is waged. A staggering 27 per cent of Congolese women have experienced sexual violence in their lifetime.

And let us all understand why women have been targeted in so many conflicts. It is because violence against women is violence against families, and violence against families is violence against whole communities. Survivors are stigmatized and isolated, families and communities are ripped apart, and entire generations are left less able to find peace and to reconcile with their communities. Sexual violence is the poisoned root of societies that are suffering endless conflict, poverty and dislocation.

It is for this reason that we welcome today's debate. When we recognize the role of sexual violence in conflict, we recognize the link between human rights and conflict. The United States has long urged the Security Council to address human rights as an issue of peace and security. Debates like the one we are having today do that in a powerful and undeniable way. This linkage should be apparent to anyone who has spent any time in conflict zones or the refugee camps that house the survivors. The sexual violence those survivors experienced is not random; it is calculated and designed to inflict punishment and fear on a community.

Tragically, we could go on all day about the different aspects of this problem around the world, but we are here to discuss solutions. The Council has sanctions tools at its disposal to punish these heinous actors around the world, but unfortunately they are terribly underutilized. For example, last year former Special Representative Bangura proposed names to the Council of perpetrators who should be held accountable for their crimes, but nothing has been done.

It is now time for the Council to use these tools to hold perpetrators accountable for their actions. It is now time to end impunity for these criminals and show survivors and the rest of the world that the international community will respond. It is now time that Member States actively develop sanctions designations for perpetrators of sexual violence in conflict. We can also designate criminals operating in conflict zones where we already have United Nations sanctions regimes in place. Taking those steps will not only end impunity for sexual violence and conflict; it will also help to deter future abuses.

The United Nations also has a role to play in countering violence against women in the field through our peacekeeping missions. Women talk to each other, and, more importantly, they understand each other. We should capitalize on this fundamental truth and do a better job of recruiting and including more women in peacekeeping. Unfortunately, only 4 per cent of uniformed peacekeepers are women. That number is even smaller in the most dangerous missions, where women are suffering the most. Deploying more women peacekeepers will provide valuable insights that male peacekeepers often cannot obtain.

However, it is not just about numbers. It is also about the roles that women peacekeepers take on. Women peacekeepers should be encouraged and empowered to engage with local communities and bring value to the work of their missions. Additionally, research shows that female participation improves dispute resolution. Women need to be at the table during peace negotiations. The United Nations should strive to include female representation in negotiating bodies and mediating teams.

Finally, the United Nations should ensure that all peacekeeping training centres around the world include training to involve women in prevention and peacebuilding efforts. Without understanding the concerns of half of the population, conflict can never be resolved. Sexual violence primarily affects women, but at its heart it is an issue of human dignity. And it is an issue of how violations of human dignity — the denial of human dignity — have an impact on peace and security. As such, it is a vital issue of concern for the Security Council. I thank the President once again for arranging today's debate.

Ms. Guadey (Ethiopia): We thank the Peruvian presidency for organizing today's open debate on the women and peace and security agenda relating to the prevention of conflict-related sexual violence. We express our appreciation for the Secretary-General's annual report on this topic (S/2018/250). I would also like to thank the briefers for their respective remarks.

Conflict-related sexual violence has indeed become rampant in various conflicts and post-conflict situations. We note that the Secretary-General's report contains useful recommendations that could form an important basis for addressing this serious challenge. The recommendations will have particular significance in the consideration of specific conflict or post-conflict situations, and the Council could explore ways and means of ensuring their implementation.

The Council should encourage or pressure, as appropriate, all parties to an armed conflict to fully comply with international humanitarian law, particularly in relation to the protection of civilians. The implementation by Member States of relevant regional and international legal instruments for the prevention, punishment and eradication of all forms of violence against women would also contribute to the national, regional and international response to victims of sexual violence.

We note that progress has been registered, including through the alignment of national legislation to international standards and implementation of joint communiqués and actions plans in several Member States, as indicated in the report of the Secretary-General. This notwithstanding, sexual violence continues to be used by belligerent parties in conflict and post-conflict situations in different parts of the world. In particular, extremist and terrorist groups, such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab, are using it as a tactic of war to terrorize civilian populations and achieve their strategic objectives. The stigmatization faced by victims of sexual violence and the challenges in their reintegration process, as well as the impunity that the perpetrators of this heinous crime enjoy, are indeed deeply troubling.

Therefore, there is need to redouble our efforts in preventing conflict-related sexual violence, providing the necessary support to victims and fighting impunity. In this regard, the three-pillar priorities identified by Special Representative of the Secretary-General Patten could serve as the basis. In addition, the recommendations of the Secretary-General to the Security Council contained in his latest report, particularly in relation to engagement with relevant parties to an armed conflict, exploring the use of periodic visits to address the issue, as well as the possibility of accelerated deployment of protection advisers, could form part of a comprehensive framework for preventing and addressing conflict-related sexual violence.

The Council should also continue to attach the utmost importance to preventing and addressing the root causes of conflict. Furthermore, measures aimed at reducing the vulnerabilities of civilians, including by enhancing the capacity of peacekeeping missions, as well as the Council's using all the available tools at its disposal, will be critical. In this regard, the Council could explore the recommendation of the Secretary-General to include sexual violence as part of the designation criteria on a case-by-case basis, particularly in the context of the use of mass rape and other forms of sexual violence by extremist and terrorist groups.

In post-conflict situations, the Council could further strengthen its peacebuilding efforts aimed at rebuilding national capacity and institutions, particularly the capacity of security and judiciary services to prevent and punish conflict-related sexual violence and addressing its root causes. That will enable the Council to fight impunity and bring perpetrators to justice, as well as to ensure the non-occurrence of such grave crimes.

We have noted from the report of the Secretary-General that some of the information concerns incidents of conflict-related sexual violence that are linked, or alleged to be linked, to Government-affiliated forces. In our view, such information should be communicated to the relevant authorities in a timely manner with a view to investigating and verifying its objectivity, accuracy and reliability. That, we believe, would contribute to fighting impunity and providing the necessary assistance to victims of conflict-related sexual violence and their families.

Finally, I would like to conclude my remarks by reaffirming the commitment of Ethiopia to working with all the relevant actors, including the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, in preventing conflict-related sexual violence and fighting impunity in this regard.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I want to start by thanking Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Ms. Pramila Patten, for their very insightful speeches, as well as Ms. Razia Sultana for her powerful speech, which should challenge us to reflect on this topic.

I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate our full support to the Special Representative and her team of experts on the rule of law and sexual violence in conflict to implement this agenda, which is a priority for France.

At the outset, France aligns itself with the statements to be made by the observer of the European Union and by the representative Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security.

I will start by making several observations on issues which are alarming before proposing an overall response and several concrete ways to strengthen our collective action against these hateful acts.

First, despite the Council's efforts, we remain confronted with an intolerable situation. We are horrified by the number of cases of sexual violence mentioned in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/250), which still includes 51 listed parties, and by the sometimes systematic use of sexual violence as a tactic of war, a method of torture and a tool of terror. In the 19 situations examined in the report, sexual violence is also synonymous with restrictions on freedom of movement. That is the case, for example, in Syria, where sexual assaults are committed at crossing points and where sexual violence in besieged areas is described as systematic. The communities targeted are also forced to move, thereby finding themselves in new situations of vulnerability. At times, progress achieved has been swept away, as in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where an increase in violence has also led to an increase in verified cases.

We condemn all those cases of violence with the greatest firmness. International justice must be able to convict the guilty. In that regard, we can highlight some progress, for example, the conviction last August of Colonel Becker for war crimes, including rape, committed in 2015 by his soldiers in Musenyi, South Kivu. We also note the end of equating rape with adultery in Afghanistan, the Sudan and Somalia.

However, a great deal of progress is still needed. For example, it is incomprehensible that no individual associated with Da'esh or Boko Haram has been convicted, even though we know those terrorist groups have used sexual violence as a tactic of war on a large scale. Furthermore, local and national justice mechanisms, such as in Somalia or South Sudan, sometimes subject victims to a double punishment by forcing them to marry their aggressors.

The statement by Ms. Razia Sultana, as well as the findings from the Special Representative's visit, refer to the systematic use of sexual violence as a tactic of war in Burma to terrorize the Rohingya and make them flee. The Human Rights Council and the General Assembly have already condemned that sexual violence, and the Security Council must ensure that justice is served against the guilty parties and that adequate assistance is provided to the victims. We must also be extremely vigilant with regard to the situation in Kachin and Shan states.

The intolerable often takes root in intolerance. Sexual violence is very often exacerbated or even incited by discrimination, including that linked to gender, inequality between women and men, prejudice and stereotypes. Even after their liberation, victims are often pursued by those prejudices and face stigmatization.

Sexual violence must therefore be fought throughout the process, from prevention to rehabilitation and reintegration. Victim support programmes, such as those established in Colombia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, are essential. Social, legal and medical services, including psychological and social support, as well as dialogue within communities, are crucial. That response must be quick, as demonstrated by the situation in the Central African Republic, where men and boys are also victims.

This struggle must also be part of a comprehensive response to all the challenges that societies pose to the rights of women. It is all the more effective when women's participation in decision-making is assured and when real attention is paid to their economic and social emancipation. Sexual violence jeopardizes women's economic and social process, and many are forced to relinquish their right to land ownership, for example. Such violence is also used as a threat to prevent them from participating in politics. France will therefore continue to call for a comprehensive response through the effective implementation of the women and peace and security agenda, as it did during the debate on 27 October 2017 (see S/PV.8079), under its presidency of the Security Council. It is not enough to be outraged; we must act.

Today's excellent concept note (S/2018/311, annex) has inspired us to reflect on prevention. Effectively combating impunity is the best method of prevention. Every effort must be made to ensure that the perpetrators of sexual violence are tried by competent national courts and, failing that, by international criminal courts, including the International Criminal Court. When judicial proceedings are impossible in the short term, we must ensure that mechanisms are in place to document crimes and enable proceedings at a later stage. The Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic and the International, Independent and Impartial Mechanism can play that indespensable role. In addition, providing support to national authorities must go hand in hand with protecting civil society actors who work each day to combat sexual violence and assist victims, and who are themselves often threatened.

The Council can now make its response more specific and effective. First, it can include sexual violence as a designation criterion, directly or indirectly, in all sanctions regimes. It must have genuine recourse to that tool. I propose that we work together to ensure that it is employed.

Next, we must ensure that peacekeeping operations have the necessary capacity to implement their mandates. Protecting women is not optional; it is an absolute necessity that must be firmly anchored at the centre of operations. In that regard, the posts of gender advisers and women's protection advisers are crucial and must be preserved.

Lastly, the Council must be able to address the issue of sexual violence in conflict more regularly — for example, by issuing press statements when instances of sexual violence are confirmed in theatres of conflict. Several United Nations initiatives should be commended and supported, such as UN-Women and Justice Rapid Response, which comprise a pool of experts to provide support to inquiry mechanisms. On a broader scale, we commend the zero-tolerance policy of the Secretary-General with regard to sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment. The United Nations must set an example, and the "UN Too" movement, which mirrors the Me Too movement, opens the door for concrete responses.

As for France, to mention a few examples, we have established a whistle-blowing unit and training courses on various types of sexual violence for soldiers ahead of their deployment, as well as for magistrates. Last year, the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs financed civil society projects to combat violence against women in Yemen and Nigeria, following similar initiatives in the Central African Republic, Cameroon and Lebanon. It is now funding the establishment of a holistic treatment centre for victims of sexual violence in the Central African Republic.

The international community, in particular the Council, must redouble its efforts in response to such odious and vile acts. This is one of France's top priorities, including within the context of its feminist diplomacy. My country will continue to demonstrate the utmost respect for that call. As President Emmanuel Macron recalled, that requirement is the essence of our dignity. More than ever, France is committed and determined to act.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank you very much, Sir, for convening today's debate on this important topic. I thank the Secretary-General for his useful report (S/2018/250), as well as Ms. Amina Mohammed, Ms. Pramila Patten and Ms. Razia Sultana for their valuable briefings.

Our discussion today focuses on preventing sexual violence in conflict by empowering women and ensuring gender equality and access to justice. In that regard, I would like to mention three main issues: first, the links among sexual violence, conflict, violent extremism and terrorism; secondly, addressing the root causes of sexual violence in conflict; and, thirdly, the importance of ensuring justice for survivors of sexual violence during conflicts.

First, with regard to the links between sexual violence, conflict, violent extremism and terrorism, this year marks the tenth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1820 (2008), which acknowledges that conflict-related sexual violence is a threat to international peace and security and requires an international response. It also acknowledges that sexual violence is being used as a war tactic. The report of the Secretary-General confirms that once again by documenting the continuation of the targeting of victims on the basis of their ethnic, religious or political affiliation with the aim to forcibly displacing them, which is tantamount to ethnic cleansing. The report also mentions instances of such acts being perpetrated in Congo and the Central African Republic, and elsewhere against the Rohingya.

Based on resolutions 2231 (2015) and 2253 (2015), and taking into the account the Council's acknowledgement that sexual violence in conflict is a war tactic and a tool used by some terrorist and extremist groups, such violence also constitutes an element of the political economy of terrorism that is used in recruitment and financing. The Security Council should hold accountable all perpetrators of such crimes and end their impunity. It should also further include in the mandates of peacekeeping and political missions tasks related to the empowerment of women in conflict and on holding the perpetrators of crimes of sexual violence accountable following the end of conflict, including referring such crimes, which amount to war crimes or crimes against humanity, to appropriate tribunals.

Secondly, with regard to the root causes of sexual violence in conflict, last year we all witnessed a retreat by extremist and violent terrorist armed groups, which led to new challenges in the areas that had been liberated from terrorism, including the need to hold to account those responsible for sexual violence and to reintegrate survivors. Sexual violence is still used as a means to force people to leave their land and to sexually exploit women and girls. It is perpetrated even by those responsible for refugee camps and by refugee smugglers. In such circumstances, the impunity enjoyed by perpetrators prevents displaced persons and refugees from returning to their homes and places of origin in safety and dignity. It also exacerbates and prolongs crises. We agree with the Secretary-General that the best way to prevent sexual violence is to protect basic freedoms and human rights, support economic empowerment and fair political participation, build national capacity and provide assistance to the survivors of sexual violence, in particular women and girls who are marginalized or economically disadvantaged.

At the regional level, the State of Kuwait hosted the International Conference for Reconstruction of Iraq, where it announced its contribution of $1 billion in the form of loans and investments. We did so because we believe that the areas liberated from the terrorist Da'esh organization must be rehabilitated and provided support for comprehensive development in order to achieve sustainable development for women and girls, as well as national reconciliation and social justice.

Thirdly, with regard to sexual violence in conflict, the State of Kuwait attaches particular importance to addressing the consequences of sexual violence on survivors by providing them access to justice. We now have in place a robust normative framework that enables States to address sexual violence in conflict, beginning with resolution 1820 (2008), as well as other related resolutions, such as resolution 1988 (2011), which established the position of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and led to improved coordination among relevant entities, as well as resolution 1960 (2010), which established a mechanism to monitor and report on sexual violence in conflict.

We support the close cooperation between Member States and United Nations Action against Sexual Violence, aimed at compensating survivors, providing access to justice, respecing their culture and affording them the psychological, physical and social assistance they need. The root causes of sexual violence in conflict are numerous, as are its forms and victims. Ensuring justice is a multidimensional issue that requires a multidimensional response to address the short- and long-term psychological, physical, economic and social consequences of sexual violence. We stress the importance of treating survivors and their children as victims first, as opposed to viewing them as being loyal to armed or terrorist groups. The national capacities of the Member States in dealing with such crimes must be reinforced.

In conclusion, while we speak of the importance of ensuring justice for the survivors of sexual violence, we would be remiss if we did not commend the steps taken by the Secretary-General in the implementation of the zero-tolerance policy towards sexual exploitation and abuse. We take note of the special measures taken with regard to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse mentioned in the Secretary-General's report. The United Nations commitment to those measures will enhance its credibility and promote wide-ranging efforts to eliminate sexual violence.

Ms. Cardona Moscoso (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): Conflict-related sexual violence involves a series of crimes against humanity that have devastating and irreversible consequences for its victims. The Security Council must address the issue on a more regular basis, which is why we thank the presidency of Peru for its initiative in convening this open debate. We would also like to thank Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed for her leadership in making this issue more visible. Moreover, we thank Ms. Pramila Patten, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, and Ms. Razia Sultana for their briefings.

Bolivia believes that conflict-related sexual violence is one of the most heinous acts against humanity because its emotional and physical consequences continue to affect its survivors long after the conflicts end. The international community must band together to tackle this problem and coordinate its efforts to implement measures at the national, regional and international levels.

Over the past 18 years, the Security Council has been developing a series of resolutions that attempt to provide a comprehensive response to sexual violence in conflict, which indubitably poses a serious threat to international security and a real impediment to the achievement of peace in countries that are victims of armed confrontation. Despite those resolutions, however, sexual violence in conflict continues to be a cruel reality in the daily lives of millions of people.

It is imperative that the Security Council be resolute in the implementation of its resolutions on combating sexual violence in conflict by promoting accountability and implementing the zero-tolerance policy. We believe that the Secretary-General's suggestions in his recent report (S/2018/250) are correct, especially with regard to including sexual violence in the designation criteria for sanctions and in ensuring that the sanctions committees can access information from an expert on gender and conflict-related sexual violence.

Although sexual violence in conflict knows no gender, it mostly affects women and girls, who are subjected to rape, sexual slavery, prostitution, forced marriage and sterilization, trafficking in persons and other forms of violence with terrible consequences for the physical and psychological well-being of the victims. Very often, instead of receiving protection and assistance, they are marginalized and rejected in their own communities.

We agree with the Secretary-General that the use of sexual violence as a tactic of war and terrorism is most alarming. In that regard, the international community must work together to support national initiatives geared towards the social reintegration of survivors and their children so that they can fully enjoy their rights.

Likewise, the increasing risk of sexual violence in refugee camps and during displacement is another challenge with which the international community must grapple. Insecurity during displacement, lack of access to basic services for refugees and the prolongation of conflicts that impede a safe return are all difficult conditions that millions of people now experience. An example is the situation on the border between Myanmar and Bangladesh. We highlight Bangladesh's goodwill in providing refuge to the Rohingya people, and we encourage Myanmar to continue working with the United Nations to ensure the safe, voluntary, dignified and sustainable return of the displaced persons.

We believe that women's empowerment as a preventive measure, access to justice and accountability are fundamental elements in the fight against sexual violence. However, it is clear that, in order to promote such measures, we must first address the root causes of conflict, reduce structural inequalities, combat extreme poverty and eradicate the discrimination that patriarchal systems have left entrenched in society and that prevent women from enjoying unhindered personal development and access to justice.

Prevention is a very important tool that the Secretary-General has been promoting over the past year. Increasing the cooperation between the United Nations and civil society is essential for prevention, in order to access more specific information that will enable us to carry out more reliable analyses of the situation.

It is key to promote the participation of women in peace, security and development processes, and to include in the agreements specific content on the inclusion of women, the fight against sexual violence and the elimination of impunity. The political empowerment of women should be promoted by States through concrete measures that transform the conditions of abuse and discrimination in which women, minorities and rural populations live. Afghanistan has provided a good example of legal and constitutional transformation for women in its work to implement its national action plan for Afghan women, which has proved to be an encouraging development, despite the fact that major challenges remain.

Similarly, close cooperation with regional organizations is also of the utmost importance. Last year, the Deputy Secretary-General visited Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which was very significant for the joint work of the United Nations and the African Union. That type of approach is very important for the implementation of the gender, peace and security programme on the African continent, as well as for the strengthening of other existing mechanisms. We also highlight the establishment of the Hybrid Court for South Sudan, which was set up through a peace agreement led by the African Union, with technical support from the United Nations. Despite the time it is taking to implement, it is a collaborative initiative that we should continue to encourage. That said, we believe that we have good tools for continuing our struggle against sexual violence. Many challenges lie ahead, and we must therefore strengthen the commitment of the Security Council and the United Nations system in general.

Mr. Radomski (Poland): We commend Peru for convening today's important debate. Poland aligns itself with the statement to be delivered later by the observer of the European Union. I would like to thank Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed for her remarks. I also thank Ms. Pramila Patten, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, for her comprehensive briefing. We greatly appreciate her tireless and dedicated work. We are honoured by the presence of Ms. Razia Sultana among us today, and we deeply appreciated her moving and inspirational testimony on behalf of the Rohingya women and girls who have suffered from sexual violence. As a voice representing civil society, hers is important for all of us to hear.

We are outraged by the persistent and widespread incidence of sexual violence in armed conflict. As many speakers have noted, sexual violence is increasingly used as a tactic of warfare and constitutes a flagrant and unacceptable violation of international humanitarian law and human rights law. We are all aware that the already staggering number of reported cases of sexual violence in conflict represents a mere fraction of the true number. One of the greatest challenges that the victims of these crimes are facing is the lack of accountability for their perpetrators. The recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/250) highlights the various challenges that we face in addressing conflict-related sexual violence. I would like to emphasize three areas that merit our particular attention today.

First, we welcome the focus of this year's report on economic empowerment as a tool for eliminating conflict-related sexual violence. Poverty and social exclusion are risk factors associated with gender-based violence. The economic empowerment of women means ensuring proper funding for programmes that address the economic and social needs of survivors, as well as implementing initiatives aimed at changing the conditions that enable violence to occur in the first place. We also believe that there is a need for a broader discussion in the Security Council of the importance of women's economic empowerment in post-conflict settings in more general terms. Peacebuilding and recovery funding still largely ignore women's economic role.

Let me now turn to the second question of the stigmatization of victims of sexual violence. Beyond the immediate cruelty of sexual violence and its consequences, victims are still all too often stigmatized and rejected by their families and communities. In their desire to avoid stigma and discrimination, the majority of victims do not report rape or other forms of sexual violence. That not only contributes to a culture of impunity, it also prevents survivors of sexual violence from accessing medical care and legal assistance. We support the Secretary-General's call to traditional, religious and community leaders to address harmful social norms and help to redirect the stigma of rape from the victims to the perpetrators. In particular, we want to draw attention to the social stigma experienced by children conceived through rape. Women with children born of sexual violence are the most marginalized of all. Children born of rape are often ostracized by their families and communities. Children living on the margins of societies are not only deprived of basic human rights, but are at a higher risk of being recruited by armed and organized-crime groups, thereby posing a direct threat to peace and security.

My third point relates to sexual violence directed against men and boys in armed conflicts. We welcome the attention that the Secretary-General's report gives to this issue. The devastating effects of sexual violence on male survivors and their families should be discussed openly in this forum. The great reluctance of many men and boys to report sexual violence makes it very difficult to accurately assess its scope. Almost certainly, the limited statistics that exist vastly understate the number of male victims. For male survivors, sexual violence remains hidden owing to cultural taboos. The hesitancy of male survivors to speak about sexual violence makes impunity for such crimes even more likely. We urge States to remove all structural and legal obstacles that prevent the investigation and prosecution of rape and other forms of sexual violence committed against men and boys.

The latest Secretary-General's report makes it clear that we should spare no effort in combating sexual violence. Only by shedding light on the issue can we lift the long shadow of sexual violence in conflict from all its survivors and prevent it from happening in the future.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for organizing today's meeting, and to express our gratitude to the briefers for their interesting and useful information. I would particularly like to thank Ms. Razia Sultana for her interesting briefing, and I hope that during Council members' upcoming visit to Myanmar, in which we will be participating, we will learn more about the issue.

Since the Security Council began to deal with the problem of sexual violence in conflict, almost 10 years ago, much has been achieved. First, it is now generally understood that sexual violence is a serious challenge rather than a collateral or secondary manifestation of individuals' baser instincts, exacerbated by situations involving armed conflict. There can also be no doubt that sexual violence is a consequence of conflict, including as a result of impunity for those who commit such crimes. In our view, therefore, eliminating sexual violence, as well as other forms of violence directed at civilians, can be achieved only by resolving armed conflicts by peaceful means and eradicating their root causes.

We have traditionally supported the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. In particular, we greatly appreciate her work on strengthening national capacity-building and developing dialogue with religious and other traditional leaders in addressing problems related to the stigmatization of victims of sexual violence and their rehabilitation. So far, unfortunately, we have failed to defeat the evil of violence. The statistics relating to the increase in sex crimes by members of terrorist groups is particularly disturbing. We urge States to cooperate more actively in dismantling the so-called shadow economy of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, which profits from trafficking in persons and sexual slavery, for instance. We hope that such crimes will be effectively documented and investigated, for which primary responsibility lies with the relevant authorities of the States on whose territory they are committed.

We would also like to take a separate look at a number of positions presented in today's report (S/2018/250). Although we share most of its conclusions and recommendations, I feel it is important to draw attention to a number of worrying aspects. First, as a general observation, if Special Representative Patten is to effectively carry out the tasks she has been set, she should make sure that she continues to stick strictly to her mandate. She should not divert her efforts and resources to the issues of gender equality overall, migration or violence against women generally. That does not mean that those problems are not important. They are, but they are not part of her mandate. Her focus should be on situations of armed conflict, and particularly those where sexual violence is occurring on a large scale.

For several years now, we have been seriously concerned about attempts to broaden the interpretation of the scope of the Security Council's mandate on combating sexual violence in conflict by using a different term — "conflict-related sexual violence". As we see it, what may at first seem to be mere technical differences actually run the risk of going beyond the Security Council's remit and infringing on the mandates of other United Nations bodies. It is essential for these purposes to differentiate between acts of sexual violence as war crimes or similar criminal acts.

Another trend we would also like to comment on is the growing emphasis in the report on human rights issues. We recall that sexual violence in conflict is first and foremost a violation of international humanitarian law. That is why both Government entities and non-Government participants in an armed conflict are obliged to ensure compliance with norms aimed at combating sexual violence, and this is something that should be monitored systematically.

Lastly and most importantly, this year we have seen ill-advised attempts to use the issue of sexual violence in conflict to resolve narrow political issues, something that is reflected in the country section of the report. In the section on Syria, in particular, the problem of atrocities against women and girls perpetrated by fighters from the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and other terrorist organizations committing outrageous acts in Syria is very much glossed over. The evaluations and figures are presented in such a way that one must extrapolate to get the full picture. How should we interpret that? How will the militias and terrorists react to that timidity? Probably with the thought that their crimes are escaping the international community's attention and that they can continue them.

At the same time, there is not a word about the substantive change in the security situation in Syria, of the fact that a greater part of its territory has been cleansed of terrorists, or that thanks to difficult, painstaking efforts, large numbers of civilians, a significant percentage of whom are women and children, some of them victims of sexual violence and abuse, have been liberated from the militias. For example, during a period of active fighting, some 165,000 people were evacuated from eastern Ghouta alone. We believe that a one-sided approach, a lack of full disclosure or a failure to mention objective realities can only harm the Special Representative's mandate and the effectiveness of her efforts to combat sexual violence in conflict.

We would also like to emphasize separately that the zero-tolerance policy that the report welcomes should not operate on the principle of us versus them. Any efforts to exempt national peacekeeping contingents acting under Security Council mandates, or representatives of non-governmental organizations working in countries, from responsibility for committing such acts are unacceptable. In that regard, we want to point out that Paris has tried to sweep under the rug the examination of cases of sexual violence, including against children, by French soldiers during Operation Sangaris in the Central African Republic. Despite the fact that the investigation was supposedly carried out, no one was punished, as far as one can tell. That is outrageous.

There are also other cases where a double standard is clearly applied. For example, in considering the draft of resolution 2410 (2018) on extending the mandate of the United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti, the United States delegation refused to establish the importance of ensuring that all accusations of sexual violence by representatives of non-governmental organizations accredited with the United Nations are reported.

In conclusion, I would like to note that we have not lost the hope that measures taken in the United Nations, including through today's discussions, will contribute to the goal of eliminating sexual and all other forms of violence against civilians in armed conflict and ultimately to resolving those conflicts to the benefit of international peace and security.

Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): I would like to commend your country, Peru, Mr. President, for including this important issue of sexual violence in conflicts around the world on our agenda during its presidency.

The delegation of Côte d'Ivoire would like to thank Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed for her briefing on the report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence (S/2018/250). We also thank Ms. Pramila Patten, Under-Secretary-General and Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, and Ms. Razia Sultana, Senior Researcher of Kaladan Press, for their briefings. We thank Ms. Sultana for the important information she provided on the situation of women in Myanmar.

The issue before us this morning offers the Security Council the opportunity to debate, once again, the issue of the important role of women in the peace and security agenda around the world. My country shares the view of experts that the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war represents a serious attack on the physical and moral integrity of its victims and is serious breach of society's moral values. Women and girls living in areas of instability are affected in an alarming way by sexual and gender-based violence. Such violence, which is usually perpetrated with the clear aim of impacting the identity and dignity of its victims, has disastrous consequences for them physically, psychologically and economically, as well as repercussions for peace and social cohesion.

As noted in the report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence (S/2018/250), sexual violence is used by the warring parties as a strategy of war and terrorism against communities. It is increasingly a lucrative activity, fueling conflicts and terrorism. Unfortunately, rape, which is often collective, sexual slavery, forced prostitution and many other forms of sexual violence are tactics to force people or entire communities to flee their place of residence, leaving behind them their property to the benefit of their aggressors.

That worrisome situation, which seriously undermines human rights and international humanitarian law, has justified the international community and the Security Council taking robust measures to deal with that challenge. In that regard, it is important to underscore the relevant provisions of resolution 1820 (2008), which recognizes that sexual violence is a tactic of war that demands an appropriate security response. It is also worth recalling the provisions of resolution 2331 (2016), which links human trafficking, sexual violence and terrorism and, at the same time, calls for psychological, medical and legal measures, inter alia, as part of the reparations to which victims are entitled.

Côte d'Ivoire remains convinced that an appropriate response to the problem of conflict-related sexual violence includes the increased participation of women in collective research and peacebuilding efforts, since, as resolution 1325 (2000) underscores, women significantly contribute to peacekeeping in their community and nation. In that connection, it remains essential to increase our efforts for the inclusion, leadership and protection of women with a view to ensuring social cohesion and lasting peace.

Following the post-election crisis in 2010 and 2011, in March 2012 Côte d'Ivoire was listed in the annex to the report of Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence (S/2012/33). It was delisted on 15 April 2017 in the light of the positive developments in the country with regard to stability and peacebuilding. That outcome is the result of the significant efforts of the Ivorian Government, which, since the end of the crisis, has made the fight against sexual violence a priority by implementing a national strategy to combat gender-based violence, in addition to the existing legal mechanisms.

In order to fight against this scourge, a national committee to combat conflict-related sexual violence was set up by decree. The committee seeks to strengthen the legislative framework by establishing a specific provision for the repression of rape. In the same way, the ownership of such efforts by the Government at the highest level of the ranks of the Forces armées de Côte d'Ivoire clearly demonstrated its relevance in fighting against the scourge. Such ownership has led, among other things, to the higher ranks making specific commitments to train their staff on the issue of sexual violence.

Issues of sexual violence, both in times of peace and of conflict, have now become an integral part of the training modules of training centres and military academies in Côte d'Ivoire. The revised code of conduct of the Forces armées de Côte d'Ivoire also places a particular emphasis on crimes related to sexual violence. In addition, the recruitment of women to positions of responsibility in areas previously reserved for men, in particular the defence sector, has contributed to the effectiveness of the steps taken by the Government with regard to the scourge. Thus, following the implementation of the Government's strategy and other initiatives, such as the many awareness-raising and training sessions, the number of documented cases of sexual violence decreased from 478 in 2012 to 30 in 2014, 3 in 2015 and none in 2017.

My country welcomes the synergy of action between the Ivoirian Government and the United Nations system, brought about by the establishment in 2015 of the joint mechanism of the Forces armées de Côte d'Ivoire and the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire to follow up on human rights violations. In addition, that comprehensive cooperation has also resulted in technical assistance being provided by the United Nations Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict as part of the action plan of the Forces armées de Côte d'Ivoire, whose implementation led to, inter alia, the establishment of specialized police units. Thanks to all those efforts, today the Forces armées de Côte d'Ivoire are the first and only entity to be have been delisted from the annex to the report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence.

Moreover, our national social cohesion programme, which was implemented in 2012 and includes a gender dimension, resulted in the establishment of six posts between 2015 and 2017 dedicated to the role of women in peacebuilding in the western and central western regions of the country, which were affected very harshly by conflict in the past. That approach has had a major impact in terms of the provision of psychosocial support for victims of sexual violence and conflict.

Notwithstanding the important progress achieved, my country remains aware of the remaining challenges with respect to the sensitive issue of reparations for sexual violence committed during the post-electoral crisis. Côte d'Ivoire would like to reaffirm its determination to conclude investigations into cases already identified and to support the victims, especially through actions undertaken and led by the Ministry for Women, Child Protection and Solidarity. Furthermore, in the context of preventing and deterring the new forms that sexual violence might take in times of peace, the Ivorian Government intends to continue those efforts and to make them a priority. That includes retaining the zero-tolerance policy currently in place in the Ivorian security and defence forces.

I cannot conclude my remarks without reiterating the gratitude of my country to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict and her team for their excellent work and efforts to support the Ivorian Government in its fight against this phenomenon. Côte d'Ivoire reaffirms not only its full readiness and willingness to share its experience but also to take up lessons learned from successes achieved elsewhere, with a view to strengthening the resilience of its people as well as existing legal and institutional frameworks, including better addressing issues related to gender-based sexual violence. In that regard, my country welcomes next June's experience-sharing and lessons-learned mission to Colombia, supported by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, with a view to taking inspiration from the successful experiences of that country with regard to victim compensation and reparations for victims of sexual violence in conflict.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): Kazakhstan thanks the Peruvian presidency for highlighting the need to prevent conflict-related sexual violence by ensuring empowerment, gender equality and access to justice. We commend Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed, for so succinctly presenting the key aspects of the Secretary-General's report (S/2018/250), as well as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Ms. Pramila Patten, on the important work of her Office. We also thank Ms. Razia Sultana for her passionate and informative, although horrifying, analysis of the situation concerning sexual violence against Rohingya women and women of other ethnic groups in Myanmar.

Kazakhstan supports the findings and recommendations of the Secretary-General's annual report. Despite the robust normative framework and the progress achieved, conflict-related sexual violence remains at an alarmingly high level. More troubling yet, sexual violence is aggravated by human trafficking and is used as a tactic of war and source of income by armed groups, terrorist organizations and transnational organized crime networks. This scourge therefore requires concerted and well-coordinated cross-national interventions with a One United Nations approach. All efforts by United Nations Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict and the Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict require improved coordination with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, INTERPOL, and regional and subregional organizations and initiatives, such as the African Women Leaders Network, in the areas of prevention, information-sharing and documentation, assistance to victims, training of security forces, legal assistance and exchange of good practices in combating sexual violence. It is also crucial to bring women to the negotiating table at the highest levels and to emphasize the responsibility of host Governments and regional organizations to provide momentum.

The State has the primary responsibility for enacting legislation to respond to sexual violence and for strengthening the law enforcement and criminal justice system, in addition to increasing the representation of women in the military and police services. National legislative responses around the world should be harmonized and made compatible with United Nations standards. We commend the Team of Experts for its continuing technical assistance to Member States and call on the international community to ensure the needed funding for the Team.

High-level field visits by the Security Council and the United Nations, such as the African Union-United Nations joint mission to African countries led by the Deputy Secretary-General in July 2017, are important to create awareness around the women and peace and security agenda, and should become a regular practice.

Sexual violence affects every aspect of a survivor's life. The Secretary-General's report underscores the fact that conflict-related sexual violence leads to the stigmatization of victims and the devastation of physical and economic security, especially of displaced, minority and rural women. Therefore, as Ms. Sultana so eloquently argued, victims should receive full, competent and speedy attention, with increased access to health care, psychosocial support, legal assistance and socioeconomic reintegration, along with improved camp management. We must support the safe, voluntary and sustainable return of displaced populations and refugees. Cooperation with religious leaders, civil society and local communities is most important in order to change extremist narratives, shift the stigma of sexual violence from the victims to the perpetrators, promote education and create awareness around the empowerment of women. The entire community often needs healing, and therefore this must be given full attention in the context of truth and reconciliation commissions and transitional justice.

We absolutely agree with all the briefers today and with the report of the Secretary-General that the international community should ensure accountability for all cases of sexual violence in conflict and bring about a resolute end to impunity. State and non-State parties to a conflict must be pressured to comply with international law. States need to work with Security Council sanctions committees, which must include, where appropriate, sexual violence as designated criteria for sanctions against individuals and organized networks.

We strongly believe that preventing sexual exploitation and abuse by the peacekeepers should be an absolute priority, with zero tolerance for such offences. Peacekeeping missions must include protecting civilians, especially women and girls, as a fundamental element in their mandates, including greater recruitment of women military and police officers. Besides that, all troops and police contingents should have full training prior to and during deployment. We support the deployment of women's protection advisers to peacekeeping missions, with ensured long-term and sustainable funding for their work.

Kazakhstan integrates the women and peace and security agenda in its national legislation, including formulating new strong pro-women policies that will guarantee women's engagement in decision-making at all levels in the political and economic life of the country. Training on gender equality for the armed and security forces and deploying women in United Nations peacekeeping operations are also priorities.

At the regional level, we are focusing on Afghanistan, with a multidimensional approach to conflict prevention and resolution, recovery and reintegration, accompanied by humanitarian and development assistance that is carried out by strengthening the security-development nexus. In cooperation with Japan and the United Nations Development Programme, Kazakhstan has launched a project for gender equality in Afghanistan, which also focuses on providing policy support and capacity development.

At the international level, we are contributing to the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women, which funds projects in post-conflict settings.

In conclusion, we are ready to work with the international community as part of every multilateral effort that promotes the central elements of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the new agenda for peace related to gender empowerment.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): As a number of speakers have noted today, the Charter of the United Nations makes clear that the United Nations was established to protect the dignity and worth of the human person. We therefore join our other colleagues in thanking you, Mr. President, for convening today's debate.

I emphatically appeal to all speakers not to politicize this issue — one of the worst afflictions we face in modern times. I think it behooves all of us to treat the issue as a common problem that we are all committed to mitigating and eventually eradicating. For the avoidance of doubt, let me say incredibly clearly that the United Kingdom salutes the courage of Ms. Sultana in her fantastic work — I am very glad that we had the chance to hear about it before the Security Council undertakes a mission to Bangladesh and Myanmar — and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for her efforts and the very comprehensive briefing that she gave us today.

I think it is really positive that so many Members of the United Nations want to speak in today's debate. With that in mind, I will be brief. Like others, we are committed to preventing, but also responding to, sexual violence in conflict. We launched the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative some years ago, which shows how central tackling sexual violence is to conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Five years on from the global summit that launched that campaign, the United Kingdom plans to hold an international meeting in 2019 to maintain a global focus. We look forward to working very closely with everybody in the Chamber to achieve our common goals.

I agree with our Russian colleague that sexual violence is one of the violations of international humanitarian law that also applies to non-State actors, which I think is incredibly important. We adopted the General Assembly Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict and the Group of Eight Declaration on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict in 2013. I hope that, as work progresses in this area, we might be able to build on those two important documents. If I may, I would like today to focus on three specific issues.

The first issue is the importance of education, in particular for girls. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by sexual violence in conflict, as we have heard from many speakers, including the Ambassadors of Kazakhstan and of Côte d'Ivoire. That is not to detract from the point that men and boys can also be victims, but it is women and girls who suffer most. Therefore, by extension, creating a global environment where gender equality and women's rights exist and discriminatory attitudes, behaviours and practices do not will obviously help to achieve that goal. The British Foreign Secretary has set a personal target for British diplomacy of helping other countries achieve 12 years of quality education for all girls. We are investing our development assistance in girls' education, as we know that it contributes to a safer and more prosperous world, reduces conflict and increases stability.

My second point regards survivor stigma, which the Polish representative very eloquently set out. I will therefore not repeat what has already been said, but just say that we completely agree with the focus that he attributed to this area. The United Kingdom's *Principles for Global Action: Preventing and Addressing Stigma Associated with Conflict-related Sexual Violence in Conflict* is a practical guide that we have drawn up to raise awareness among policymakers of the challenges concerning this issue. We truly hope that the principles can be applied in all contexts where sexual violence has occurred.

Finally, I will broach justice and accountability, which other speakers have also touched upon. The survivors of sexual violence and children born as a result of rape must receive justice for what has happened to them. That is a critical element of our prevention efforts. There has been some important progress — for example, at the Kavumu trial in the Democratic Republic of the Congo late last year, when 11 Congolese militia members were convicted of crimes against humanity for murder and rape against 37 young children. But there is much more to be done. Although Kosovo and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant are not mentioned in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/250), there continues to be a gap in justice and accountability for sexual violence cases from those conflicts.

In conclusion, we join others in urging all Member States to implement the international protocol on the documentation and investigation of sexual violence in conflict. That provides guidance on achieving accountability for this truly abhorrent crime, which we must all pledge to tackle.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China thanks the Peruvian presidency for its initiative to convene today's open debate. I would like to thank the Deputy Secretary-General, Ms. Amina Mohammed, and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Ms. Pramila Patten, for their briefings. China also listened attentively to the statement made by the civil society representative.

The current international security situation remains complex and challenging, marked by frequent armed conflicts and rampant terrorism. In some countries and territories, people still live in the shadow of war and conflict. Vulnerable groups, such as women and girls, bear the brunt of such instability and fall victim to sexual violence in armed conflicts. China strongly condemns and firmly opposes the use of sexual violence as a tactic of war and any act of sexual violence against women and girls. The international community is duty-bound to take comprehensive measures and effectively strengthen its cooperation to address this issue.

First, it is necessary to promote the peaceful resolution of armed conflicts and eliminate the breeding grounds for sexual violence in conflict. The international community should continue to exercise diplomacy to achieve a political settlement of critical issues and use negotiation, good offices and mediation to achieve a peaceful settlement of disputes. The Security Council resolutions concerning women and peace and security should be implemented earnestly. At each stage of the peace process, the unique perspective of women should be leveraged and their safety and security concerns addressed, in order to guarantee women the right to full participation in, and clout during, decision-making.

Secondly, vigorous support for the countries concerned is required to help them strengthen capacity-building, shore up protection through stabilization and promote equality through development, thereby effectively safeguarding the rights of women. The countries involved shoulder the primary responsibility for preventing and combating sexual violence in conflict and for protecting women and children. The international community should respect the sovereignty and will of those countries and the measures taken by their Governments in national contexts and actively provide them with constructive assistance to enhance their capacity-building in the areas of, inter alia, security, the economy and governance, so as to help bolster the status of women and fully realize their empowerment.

Thirdly, we must resolutely crack down on terrorism and transnational organized crime. The international community should act firmly to put an end to the horrific acts of terrorist and extremist forces that harm women and children, closely integrate the elimination of sexual violence in conflict with the fight against terrorism, uphold uniform standards of counter-terrorism and strengthen international coordination. The countries concerned should scale up cooperation in border control and law enforcement to provide a safe environment and a dignified social climate for terrorized victims of sexual violence.

Fourthly, it is necessary to ensure that all the relevant United Nations bodies work in synergy. The Security Council should fulfil its primary responsibility of maintaining international peace and security and improve its coordination with the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, the Peacebuilding Commission and UN-Women, so that those bodies can work together to address issues in areas such as women and peace and security, within the purview of their respective mandates and expertise. In addition, cooperation with relevant regional and subregional organizations should also be strengthened so that they can leverage their expertise and unique perspectives to create a favourable environment in which women and girls can live and thrive.

China stands ready to continue working with the international community to create a peaceful, safe and stable international environment and make greater contributions to the early elimination of sexual violence in conflict and to the continued development of the global women's cause.

Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren (Netherlands): I would like to start by thanking the Deputy Secretary-General, Ms. Amina Mohammed, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Ms. Pramila Patten, and Ms. Razia Sultana for their pertinent briefings. I also wish to express our sincere gratitude to Peru for organizing this important debate.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands fully aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the observer of the European Union, as well as that to be delivered on behalf of the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security.

The Secretary-General's report (S/2018/250) and today's testimonies from the briefers describe in no uncertain terms the gruesome and widespread prevalence of sexual violence in both conflict-affected and post-conflict settings. The mere fact that the report covers one tenth of the United Nations membership is disturbing in itself. Allow me to focus on three important aspects: first, the plight of the Rohingya in Myanmar; secondly, the fight against sexual exploitation and abuse; and, thirdly, the course of action to stop impunity.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands adds its voice to that of today's civil society briefer, Ms. Sultana, in condemning in the strongest terms the cruelty that Rohingya women and girls have faced both before and after fleeing their homes in Rakhine state. We cannot remain silent about the injustice done, and the trauma inflicted on, those women and girls and their wider communities. It is upsetting that now, after Syria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a State actor has once again been listed as being credibly suspected or responsible for sexual violence in a situation of armed conflict. That demands a concerted response from the international community to bring justice and rehabilitation to the victims of that violence.

There is a mosaic on the third floor of this building that reads "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you", which brings me to my second point. While the report primarily looks at sexual violence inflicted by armed groups and State actors, we cannot ignore cases of sexual exploitation and abuse or sexual harassment committed by those working for, or associated, with the United Nations. The Kingdom of the Netherlands reaffirms its total commitment to the United Nations zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse and on sexual harassment — a matter that is rightfully gaining the attention and visibility it deserves.

Masculine-dominated cultures often create obstacles to upholding zero-tolerance policies. However, like the Secretary-General, we are determined to remove those obstacles and work towards true gender equality. Moreover, by including women and the gender perspective in prevention, peacekeeping and conflict resolution, we can diminish sexual violence in conflict, as well as sexual exploitation and abuse.

My third point is on the course of action to stop impunity. I would like to echo the words of Special Representative Patten: sexual violence is avoidable. The very first recommendation that the Secretary-General makes to the Security Council in his report is to include sexual violence as a part of the designation criteria for sanctions. Sanctions are a tool that could be more effectively used to deter sexual violence and to curb and constrain the individuals involved. They have the potential to protect the safety and lives of millions of women and girls, as well as boys and men, living in conflict areas. The recent inclusion of that criterion in the sanctions regime for the Central African Republic is a welcome development that needs to be taken up more consistently. We call on the Council to systematically and explicitly incorporate and apply sexual violence as a designation criterion in sanctions regimes, particularly in those regimes targeting the actors listed in the report. For those conflict-affected countries for which no specific United Nations sanctions regime exists, we urge the Council to consider the adoption of targeted sanctions regimes that would allow for the inclusions of a specific designation criterion on sexual violence.

Ultimately, sanctions cannot be an alternative to prosecution for crimes that are punishable under international law. It is first and foremost up to Member States to ensure the prosecution of perpetrators and to facilitate reparations under international humanitarian law. Furthermore, it is up to Member States to guarantee survivor's access to all legal, psychosocial and medical services, including safe abortion, emergency contraception and HIV treatment.

Strengthening the capacity of national institutions is critical to ensuring accountability for past crimes and prevention and deterrence for the future. In that context, we recognize the work of the Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict in building national capacities to enhance accountability for conflict-related sexual violence. However, if national governments prove to be unable or unwilling, the Council should revert to other means and channels, such as the International Criminal Court, to make sure that both State and non-State parties comply with their obligations under international law.

Let me end by reiterating our strong support for the work of Special Representative Patten and the vision she has articulated since assuming office last year.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, I would like to begin my statement by aligning myself with the statement to be made by Ms. Fatima Kyari Mohammed, Permanent Observer of the African Union to the United Nations.

I thank the Peruvian presidency and Ambassador Gustavo Meza-Cuadra for convening this much-needed debate during a year that commemorates the tenth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1820 (2008), through which sexual violence in armed conflict was included on the Security Council agenda. I would also like to acknowledge the work, deep commitment and informative and alarming briefings of Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed, Ms. Pramila Patten, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, and Ms. Razia Sultana, representative of the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security. They have contextualized sexual violence in armed conflicts and are making an effective and urgent appeal for the need for sustainable peace, security and development.

As this is the first statement of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea on this important issue, I wish to begin by saying that my country unequivocally condemns sexual violence in both armed conflicts and times of peace, as well as the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war. We believe this to be one of the worst attacks on human dignity, and we share the deep concern of everybody in the Chamber about the growing trend of such unacceptable acts in the world.

The Secretary-General's most recent report (S/2018/250), which covers the period from January to December 2017, notes progress on some efforts focused on preventing and responding to sexual violence in armed conflict in the context of post-conflict situations and areas of particular concern, especially through investments in human resources and information, action policies and the architecture of the Organization. We wish to highlight the outstanding work of the Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict, United Nations Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict, the appointment of a victims' rights advocate and a zero-tolerance commitment to this type of abuse.

Nevertheless, the report also reminds us that such incidents are not random or isolated, but rather are an integral part of the operations, ideology and economic strategy of the parties — State and non-State groups — to many conflicts, and that such occurrences have been compounded as a result of sexual violence becoming a tactic of war and a source of income for parties involved in conflict, be they groups of violent extremists, terrorists or organized crime in those territories or neighbouring countries. The movements of people fleeing from conflict within and among countries further complicate the situation.

Victims of sexual violence are often the most vulnerable individuals: women, children and men of all ages, sometimes refugees or migrants, who, due to conflict, are caught in the crossfire and fall victim to violence, sexual slavery, forced prostitution and sterilization, human trafficking and other forms of sexual abuse. Equatorial Guinea wishes to call on all parties involved in conflict to commit to ensuring the protection of civilians, in accordance with international humanitarian law, bearing in mind the primary responsibility of national Governments in that regard, respecting the sovereignty of countries and supporting their efforts in implementing the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

We cannot separate violence, including sexual violence, from the root causes of conflict. Peace cannot be achieved without investing in the sustainable development of countries and gender equality. That is the most effective conflict prevention strategy. In that regard, we wish to recognize the ambitions of the Agenda 2063 of the African Union and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its clear focus on people-driven sustainable development, anchored in gender equality, the empowerment of women and equitable economic growth among and within countries. We also recognize the framework of collaboration and commitment of the African Union and the United Nations in implementing the women and peace and security agenda and in the fight against sexual violence in armed conflicts, the impunity of the perpetrators of those atrocities and ensuring accountability for those crimes.

Equatorial Guinea reaffirms the pivotal role of implementing resolutions 1325 (2000), 1820 (2008), 2331 (2016) and other relevant resolutions to guarantee the participation and empowerment of women in conflicts and to promote and take the necessary action to avoid attacks of sexual violence in those environments.

As our country is free from conflict, at the national level we are focusing on the promotion of women, gender equality and the fight against sexual violence, within the framework of our sustainable development strategy, Horizon 2020. Our country's willingness to monitor, follow up on and propose actions, policies and strategies aimed at promoting women, which is reflected in the composition of our Security Council team, is part of the action plan of our national education-for-all programme, the national multisectoral action plan on women and gender equality, and the work of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Gender Equality, which, among other activities, is responsible for national campaigns to combat violence against women and girls. It is also worth mentioning the Equatorial Guinea Child Support Centre, an institution led by the nation's First Lady, Mrs. Constancia Mangue Nsue de Obiang.

In conflict situations and their international responses, Equatorial Guinea would like to recommend that organizations in charge of coordinating peacebuilding missions coordinate the application of best practices by training all recruited contingents during predeployment preparation, through integrating the gender perspective and providing solid training on sexual exploitation and abuse. Likewise, we advocate continued support for the various components of the United Nations architecture to combat sexual violence in armed conflicts and for collaboration among them and United Nations agencies for counter-terrorism, organized crime, humanitarian response and sustainable development, in order to safeguard the recovery and reintegration of victims, especially children born of sexual violence and women who have survived such assault.

I conclude by saying that Equatorial Guinea reiterates its strong condemnation of all those acts and our support for the United Nations zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse. We again express our willingness to cooperate in this area as part of the Security Council, based on the resolutions adopted in that regard.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Peru.

I welcome the important briefings of the Deputy Secretary-General, Ms. Amina Mohammed, and Ms. Pramila Patten, as well as the valuable testimony of Ms. Razia Sultana. We also welcome the participation of a significant number of countries that have requested to take part in this open debate.

My delegation is especially grateful for the support and contribution of women's organizations in preparing for this annual debate and for the Informal Expert group on Women and Peace and Security, which Peru has the honour to chair alongside Sweden.

We wish to express Peru's commitment to the women and peace and security agenda, which is a crucial component of the fight against sexual violence in conflicts. We are convinced that the United Nations, particularly the Security Council, has a fundamental role to play in preventing this atrocious crime.

We note with deep concern the magnitude of the problem and the changing patterns of sexual violence noted in the Secretary-General's latest report (S/2018/250). Its widespread and systematic use as a military tactic and attack against collective identities must be acknowledged and confronted as a threat to peace and international security. Consequently, we must condemn in the strongest terms all forms of sexual violence in armed conflicts, which overwhelmingly affects women, girls and boys. We must protect the victims and ensure that those responsible are held accountable. But that is not enough. A comprehensive strategy against this scourge requires addressing its root causes. To that end, the empowerment of women, gender equality and access to justice are key.

Evidence illustrates that greater participation by women in decision-making processes results in a lower likelihood of conflict, and that defending and promoting their rights reduces their vulnerability. Equality and empowerment have a direct impact on the maintenance of peace and security. The same applies to access to justice. We reaffirm the critical need to ensure that those responsible for such acts of violence are held accountable before the justice system and to eliminate all structural obstacles that hamper investigation and prosecution of rape and other forms of sexual violence. Moreover, due attention to and the rehabilitation of the victims are critical to any process of building sustainable peace. It is necessary to understand that their traumas are also psychological in nature and carry the potential to destroy the social fabric of a community.

We cannot ignore the stigma and fear of the victims, or their intimidation by their attackers. The majority of cases of sexual violence are not reported. This reflects the low level of confidence in and credibility of national institutions, which is exacerbated when the aggressors are members of the security forces. It is necessary to create a closer relationship between the State and its institutions and the victims. In this regard, Peru has a national plan on violence against women and a comprehensive reparations programme for the victims of violence in Peru between 1980 and 2000.

The Peruvian commitment to the women and peace and security agenda is also manifested in the progressive increase in Peruvian women's participation as Blue Helmets, pursuant to resolution 1820 (2008). In this regard, we wish to highlight the importance of incorporating the gender perspective into the mandates of peacekeeping operations deployed by the Council. There is also the need to adequately train Blue Helmets to protect women and children's human rights. The Security Council must also continue to encourage, support and monitor specific commitments and plans to prevent sexual violence in the conflicts on its agenda. We consider it important to recall, in line with resolution 1820 (2008), that sexual crimes should not be subject to amnesty in the context of conflict resolution processes.

We wish to conclude by expressing our appreciation of and support for the work of the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict and her team, and to highlight the high priority given to this issue by the Secretary-General, in keeping with the need to build sustainable peace. In the words of the Secretary-General, the time has come "to give that agenda the investment and action it deserves, so as to replace horror with hope" (*S/2018/250, para. 22*).

I resume my functions as President of the Council.

I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than four minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate the texts in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber.

I now give the floor to the representative of Canada.

Mr. Alghabra (Canada): It is my distinct pleasure to participate in this open debate on sexual violence in conflict. Let me begin by expressing my gratitude to Deputy Secretary-General Mohammed and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Ms. Pramila Patten, for their briefings, and to our Peruvian counterparts for the work they have put into the organization of this year's debate. I also want to sincerely thank Ms. Sultana for her courageous work and her powerful testimony. Canada is supportive of her activism and stands with her.

Today I am pleased to speak on behalf of the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security, an informal network of 54 interested Member States chaired by Canada and representing all five regional groups of the United Nations. We are outraged by the persistent and widespread occurrence of sexual violence in armed conflict by State and non-State actors. Sexual violence is being used as a tactic of warfare and a tactic of terrorism and is a flagrant and unacceptable violation of international humanitarian law and of international human rights law.

Among the many concerning country situations documented in the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/250), the sexual violence inflicted against the Rohingya is especially appalling. It demands a swift and concerted response from the international community, including in meeting the needs of the survivors of such violations and bringing those responsible to justice. Above all, we must do more to prevent sexual violence in conflict from occurring in the first place. We encourage the Security Council to give due consideration to the early warning signs of sexual violence in its monitoring of conflict situations.

Indeed, preventing sexual violence is part of conflict prevention and sustaining peace. We must ensure that related expertise, including gender advisers and women protection advisers, are provided with the access and resources needed to fulfil their critical tasks in peacekeeping operations. Cooperation with local civil society organizations can also help identify precursors, risks and prevention and protection strategies for sexual violence in conflict. Furthermore, the implementation of joint communiqués, action plans and national policies to curb conflict-related sexual violence play an essential role and we are encouraged by the progress of a number of States in this regard.

Justice and accountability are means of prevention. Indeed, a climate of impunity discourages reporting, undermines assistance and abets further violations. We therefore call for accountability for crimes of sexual violence in armed conflict. This in turn requires effective investigation and documentation, legal assistance for the victims of sexual violence, and adequate legal and evidentiary frameworks to prosecute such crimes.

Moreover, accountability for and the prevention of sexual violence should be included in peace agreements, including, where appropriate, in transitional justice mechanisms promoting justice, truth, reparations and measures to prevent their recurrence. Amnesties should not be granted to perpetrators of sexual violence, and sexual violence should be explicitly prohibited by the terms of ceasefires and peace agreements. We recognize the invaluable contribution of the Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict to building national capacities to enhance accountability for conflict-related sexual violence. We welcome the landmark ruling of the International Criminal Court in the case of *Prosecutor v. Bosco Ntaganda*, and note the recent surrendering of Al Hassan Ag Abdoul Aziz Ag Mohamed Ag Mahmoud, wanted for crimes against humanity and war crimes in Mali, including rape and sexual slavery.

In contrast, it is disconcerting that not a single member of Da'esh or Boko Haram has been prosecuted for sexual violence crimes to date. We emphatically call on the Security Council to explicitly include sexual violence as a designation criterion within United Nations sanctions regimes where such crimes are persistently perpetrated. Relevant sanctions committees should also be supported by dedicated gender and sexual violence expertise and draw on information from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

In all our efforts to ensure accountability, we must not lose sight of the needs and rights of survivors of sexual violence in conflict. Greater efforts are needed at all levels to ensure that survivors have access to the full range of livelihood, social, legal, psychosocial and non-discriminatory medical services to promote their rehabilitation and reintegration into their communities.

Fundamentally, we are of the view that systemic gender-based discrimination, such as the exclusion of women from political life, economic marginalization and discriminatory systems of both formal and informal law, is conducive to sexual violence in conflict. Any serious effort to address sexual violence in conflict must confront this fact.

Lastly, we condemn in the strongest terms cases of sexual exploitation and abuse in peacekeeping operations and in international assistance, as well as sexual harassment within the United Nations. We encourage the Secretary-General to ensure that common standards are developed and implemented across all United Nations entities to better prevent and respond to all cases of sexual exploitation and abuse.

Please allow me to make some additional points as Canada's representative.

We meet at a time of great uncertainty in the world, where an astounding proportion of the global population is living with conflict every day. These people are not living at the outer edges of conflict, but are fully immersed in the ugliness of war. The year 2017 was an alarming reminder of how the rise in conflict and violent extremism continues to trigger patterns of sexual violence. The disproportionate effect of violent extremism on women and girls is evident in many conflicts. It was especially brought to the fore of Canadians' minds when we heard of the terrible atrocities carried out by Da'esh, including against Yazidis, who suffered a particularly high level of violence. As a result, Canada made a commitment last year to providing assistance to over 1,200 vulnerable Yazidi women and children and other survivors of Da'esh by resettling them in Canada. This was an important decision that we can be proud of.

But sexual violence in conflict continues around the world. As the Secretary-General highlights in his report, "[w]ars are still being fought on and over the bodies of women" (*S/2018/250, para. 9*). Women in conflict stand as courageous survivors of violence, not victims. We must harness their resilience, their determination and their innovative solutions to find ways to end conflict. We commend the courageous women who lead us out of conflict, but we must resolve collectively to ensure that these crimes stop.

Canada is particularly alarmed by the plight of Rohingya women and girls in Myanmar and Bangladesh. For the first time this year, the Secretary-General's report specifically names the Myanmar Armed Forces for engaging in patterns of sexual violence in conflict. Women there have talked about suffering sexual trauma at the hands of both the Myanmar military and those who support it. Canada has already sanctioned Major General Maung Maung Soe under the Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act for his role in the oppression, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity committed against the Rohingya minority in Myanmar.

Even after fleeing Myanmar, many women and girls continue to face gender-based violence. Their movements within refugee camps are often restricted for fear of being abducted for trafficking or forced marriage, harassment and sexual violence. As Ms. Patten reported to the Council in December 2017, every woman or girl she spoke with during her visit to the camps and settlements in Bangladesh

> "reported having either endured or witnessed sexual violence... rape, gang-rape by multiple soldiers, forced public nudity and humiliation, and sexual slavery in military captivity... There are indications that this pattern of widespread and systematic sexual violence has been used as a tool of dehumanization and collective punishment" (*S/PV.8133, p. 4*).

I thank Ms. Patten and the rest of today's briefers for being a voice for survivors and for their courage and leadership. I cannot emphasize enough that these horrific actions must be addressed directly by the international community, for there can be no impunity for those who inflict such callous and indiscriminate violence against a civilian population.

Rape has been used as a weapon of war against the Rohingya. Our briefers have spoken of this heinous violence and Canada's Special Envoy, Mr. Bob Rae, also spoke of this tragic reality in the report he published earlier this month. All United Nations and international institutions must be mobilized to bring the perpetrators to justice. Today's debate is of critical importance. We are hopeful that together we can find a way to ease the suffering of all those affected by this crisis.

Through its feminist international assistance policy, Canada is supporting UN-Women to rapidly deploy experts to ensure that international organizations and transitional justice processes are able to investigate and prosecute incidents of sexual and gender-based violence in conflict-affected States. This includes deploying a sexual and gender-based violence investigator to the Independent International Fact-finding Mission on Myanmar.

Accountability for crimes of this nature must be our priority. That is why we urge the Security Council to systematically incorporate sexual violence as a specific designation criterion in United Nations sanctions regimes where such crimes are persistently perpetrated. It is why we call on the Council to ensure that the issues of women's rights and sexual violence are consistently and adequately addressed when establishing and renewing the mandates of United Nations peacekeeping and political missions.

Among its five objectives, Canada's national action plan on women and peace and security focuses on preventing, responding to and ending impunity for sexual and gender-based violence and sexual exploitation and abuse. It seeks to meet the specific needs of women and girls in humanitarian settings, including the upholding of their sexual rights and access to sexual and reproductive health services. Through our action plan, we want to empower women and girls economically, socially and politically so that their voice can be amplified. We know they are powerful agents of change. Our duty is to remove the barriers of oppression and discrimination. Societies in which women and girls have an equal voice and equal rights benefit from equal opportunities and live in equal safety and security are far more likely to reject sexual violence.

Canada is grateful to Special Representative Patten for her efforts to raise alarm about sexual violence trends globally. We appreciate the work done by the United Nations Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict. We also thank civil society organizations — many of which are represented here today — for the ongoing good work they are doing to stop sexual violence and hold its perpetrators to account. Civil society and the women's movement are the backbone of our societies.

Canada calls for justice for the survivors of such horrific crimes. Our response ought to be holistic and centred on the survivors. We must support communities in Myanmar and in Bangladesh, but most importantly we must ensure that reproductive health, psychosocial and legal services are available to these communities, as well as the sensitive and coordinated documentation of cases. We must act together within the United Nations and other institutions to defend the rights of all people to live free of sexual violence and abuse.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Liechtenstein.

Ms. Oehri (Liechtenstein): We align ourselves with the statement delivered by the representative of Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security.

Eight resolutions adopted by the Council reflect the significant progress we have made in the area of women, peace and security. In resolution 1820 (2008), the Council recognized for the first time that sexual violence can constitute a war crime, a crime against humanity or a constitutive act with respect to genocide. A decade later, patterns of sexual violence remain a sad reality in many conflict situations, and effective responses have been rare.

The latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/250) documents sexual violence including rape, sexual slavery or forced prostitution, pregnancy, abortion, sterilization and marriage in 19 conflict situations, committed by 47 parties. Patterns of sexual violence are often embedded in and compounded by underlying structural conditions such as inequality, gender-based discrimination and the violation of minority rights. The empowerment of women is therefore a key ingredient of an effective response. This requires the increased representation of women in mechanisms to address conflicts and the incorporation of a gender perspective in conflict resolution and peace processes.

The situation of the Rohingya community is of high relevance to our discussion and we welcome the presence of an advocate for the Rohingya today. Many of the 700,000 civilians fleeing Rakhine state to Bangladesh have endured physical and psychological sexual assault. Rape, sexual slavery and other forms of grave sexual violence have mostly been committed against Rohingya women and girls. Those who have fled are vulnerable to further violations, including trafficking for the purpose of forced marriage or sexual exploitation. We commend the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) for exploring the option of investigating the deportation of the Rohingya community as a crime against humanity. This is precisely the type of situation for which the ICC was created, and the Council should refer it to the Court.

In Syria, sexual violence has been used as tactic of war and as part of an attack against the civilian population, committed by various parties to the conflict with rampant impunity. It is shocking in particular that not a single member of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant has been prosecuted for sexual violence offenses as of yet. The International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism for the Syrian Arab Republic, created by the General Assembly in light of paralysis in the Security Council, has made sexual and gender-based violence a priority of its work. We call on all States to cooperate with the Mechanism by sharing relevant information and through financial support.

Accountability is an essential part of the fight against conflict-related sexual violence. International criminal justice mechanisms have done groundbreaking work. The finding in the Akayesu case before the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda that sexual violence can amount to genocide was a landmark decision. Of comparable relevance was the verdict of the ICC in finding Jean-Pierre Bemba Gombo criminally responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity for sexual violence on the basis of command responsibility. The Prosecutor of the ICC has made sexual and gender-based violence crimes one of her strategic priorities as a reflection of the very progressive stance of the Rome Statute, adopted 20 years ago, on sexual and gender-based violence. Justice Rapid Response has also done invaluable work to investigate sexual and gender-based violence.

Women and girls are disproportionately affected by sexual violence, but we must not ignore the fact that many men and boys become victims as well. The report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/250) documents incidents in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan, Sri Lanka and Syria. The rape and sexual torture of men and boys are all too commonly practiced in detention settings, often aimed at extracting confessions during interrogation. Such patterns continue to be underreported, owing to cultural taboos and fear of being stigmatized. Sexual violence against men and boys in situations of armed conflict warrants our increased attention in order to inform our response to gender-based sexual violence overall, with accountability and necessary services to victims as key components.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Brazil.

Mr. Duque Estrada Meyer (Brazil) (*spoke in Spanish*): I wish to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this debate. I also thank Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohamed and the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Ms. Pramila Patten, for their briefings, and Ms. Razia Sultana for her statement.

We note with concern that, despite the efforts of the United Nations, serious incidents of sexual violence continue to occur on massive scales in armed conflicts. Addressing this problem is rendered all the more difficult as victims of violence are often unable to find ways to report such abuse, given the absence of protection mechanisms and the fear of stigmatization or even punishment for speaking up. We underscore that the most effective way to combat the crime of sexual violence is the prevention of conflict itself. In this regard, we support the preventive approach advocated by the Secretary-General in his report on the issue (S/2018/250).

The increase in the number of women in United Nations peacekeeping operations and in peacebuilding initiatives is a central element in advancing the prevention of and response to sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations, including in cases of sexual abuse and exploitation. It also represents the positive contributions to various aspects of conducting multidimensional operations, in particular by improving interaction with women in local societies and contributing to the effectiveness of monitoring and investigating reports of abuse.

Brazil therefore welcomes the measures recently announced by the Office of Military Affairs with a view to reaching the target of women constituting 15 per cent of those deployed in peacekeeping operations. In this regard, Brazil has redoubled its efforts to increase the number of female candidates for civilian and military posts in peacekeeping operations and special political missions. In July, Brazil will host a United Nations course for developing leadership capacity among female police officers aimed at Latin American and Caribbean nations.

We recall that the issue of access to justice for all victims and the punishment of perpetrators are of central importance in confronting the threat of sexual violence in conflict and upholding respect for international humanitarian law. Conflict resolution processes must take into account the legal, medical and psychosocial needs of victims of sexual violence. The complementary jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court can play a decisive role in that regard. The Security Council must also contribute to such efforts by conferring mandates and adequate means of protection for women and advocating for the punishment of such crimes. Brazil has been supporting cooperation projects to addressed gender-based violence at the bilateral and triangular levels in countries such as Haiti, Guinea-Bissau and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

We express our appreciation for and gratitude to the Secretary-General for his new strategic approach to taking action against sexual exploitation and abuse committed by personnel of United Nations peacekeeping missions and special political missions. Brazil signed the voluntary compact on preventing and addressing sexual exploitation and abuse and strongly supports all efforts for its full implementation. Brazil has also been part of the Women, Peace and Security Focal Points Network since its creation. A year ago, we launched our first national action plan on women, peace and security.

We will achieve inclusive and lasting peace only when women, who form half of the world's population, can participate fully in all efforts to that end. With regard to the prevention of sexual violence in conflict, the perspective of women is all the more essential in the general framework of the peace continuum proposed by the Secretary-General. As the representative of Brazil to the United Nations Conference on International Organization in San Francisco in 1945, Bertha Lutz, said: "There will never be unbreakable peace in the world until women help to forge it".

The President: I now give the floor to the observer of the European Union.

Mr. Van Den Akker (European Union): I am speaking on behalf of the European Union and its member States. The candidate countries Turkey, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania; the country of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina; as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, align themselves with this statement.

I thank the Deputy Secretary-General, Ms. Amina Mohammed, and Ms. Razia Sultana, who spoke on behalf of civil society and in particular the Rohingya, for their briefings. We thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Ms. Pramila Patten, for her leadership and dedication. The European Union (EU) has been and will remain a staunch supporter of her important mandate.

Conflict-related sexual violence, as well as all forms of violence and discrimination against women, girls, men and boys, are crimes and violations of human rights. The European Union welcomes the report submitted by the Secretary-General (S/2018/250). It provides harrowing evidence of the occurrence of sexual violence in conflict in numerous places around the world.

While there is improved awareness of the prevalence and hideousness of sexual violence in conflict and normative progress has been achieved, including in the Council through dedicated resolutions, countless women, men, girls and boys still live under the constant threat of sexual violence. Those living in areas plagued by conflict and violent extremism have the most to fear. Behind every statistic in the report — and unfortunately, we know that underreporting continues to be a challenge — we find a life and a person. Two simple questions are posed: What are we, as the international community, doing to put an end to that, and what is needed that we are not yet doing?

The European Union has taken concrete action to prevent and respond to conflict-related sexual violence. Our engagement to achieve gender equality, security, sustaining peace and sustainable development is at the core of our daily work. The European Union emphasizes the continued importance of a holistic approach that addresses conflict-related sexual violence as part of the broader women and peace and security agenda, recognizing that sexual and gender-based violence are also the results of gender inequalities and women's and girls' subordinated positions and patriarchal contexts. While sexual and gender-based violence predominantly target women and girls, men and boys are also among the primary and secondary victims of those crimes.

The issue of stigma placed on the victim rather than on the perpetrator, where it would rightfully belong, must be analysed and addressed within the broader context of sexual and gender-based violence. It is well known that stigma in the wake of sexual violence can have lasting and even lethal repercussions. Every person who has suffered from sexual violence must have the right and access to comprehensive health-care services, justice and reparations, and not be revictimized, rejected, ostracized or worse.

The European Union wants to see practical steps towards effective prevention and protection from conflict-related sexual violence. It remains unacceptable that most incidents of conflict-related sexual violence, including rape, continue to be met with impunity. It is nothing but a failure that, for instance, not a single member of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant or Boko Haram has yet been prosecuted for sexual offences. Accountability and access to justice are a must. Victims and witnesses of sexual violence have to be ensured access to impartial and safe tribunals and reparations, including as a form of transitional gender justice, and their safety must be sufficiently addressed during and after those legal processes.

The European Union has implemented a global project to support gender-sensitive transitional justice. The project has been realized in Kenya, Kosovo, Colombia and the Philippines, and also supported the development of global norms and standards. Another EU action implemented in the Democratic Republic of the Congo strengthened the capacities of the military justice system to prosecute war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in the Kasai and the east of the country. The project supported military courts, which then tried and convicted 11 militiamen and a provincial member of Parliament for crimes against humanity, rape and murder committed between 2013 and 2016.

The EU is determined to remain a global leader in ending sexual and gender-based violence, including in conflict-related situations. One example of that is the joint EU-United Nations Spotlight Initiative to eliminate violence against women and girls. Launched in September 2017 with an initial investment of €500 million by the EU, the Spotlight Initiative recognizes that women and girls are disproportionately subjected to violence, including femicide, sexual violence, intimate partner violence, trafficking and harmful practices. It is one of the largest-scale demonstrations of the political will of the European Union and the United Nations to say "enough is enough". We must act now to address gender-based violence in all its forms.

We continue to support United Nations action against conflict-related sexual violence. We recognize that the United Nations peacekeeping operations play a vital role in the protection of women, girls, men and boys as part of their mandated task of protecting civilians. We also stress the importance of training peacekeeping personnel in preventing sexual exploitation and abuse.

In addition, we stress the importance of actions designed and implemented in partnership with civil society, ensuring that they are able to influence the analysis, design and planning of activities related to the prevention and protection against conflict-related sexual violence. We are troubled about the continuously shrinking space for civil society in many parts of the world, including attempts to silence women's voices by threatening them with rape.

In 2017, the EU allocated almost €22 million in humanitarian aid to the prevention of and response to sexual and gender-based violence worldwide. In June 2017, the EU took over the leadership of the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies — a global initiative of more than 76 stakeholders to make sure that all humanitarian actors work together to prevent and mitigate gender-based violence, from the earliest onset of a crisis.

Also in June 2017, the EU signed the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. With that signature, we committed to further strengthening the existing legal framework on preventing and combating violence against women. The EU is also continuously working to improve its procedures and practices in its civilian missions and military operations. Last year, we took stock of our programmes and projects that address conflict-related sexual violence. We have identified 43 multi-year projects, with an overall value of €43 million, and two multi-country programmes, with an overall value of €8.5 million.

The EU will continue to accelerate the implementation of our commitments to eliminating sexual and gender-based violence, both within and outside our borders and in times of peace, crisis and conflict. We will continue to provide specific support to victims of violence, including in the most remote and fragile areas. The EU is also strengthening efforts to ensure that women, girls, men and boys who arrive in the European Union fleeing conflict, instability, persecution, discrimination or violence, including sexual violence, have access to medical care, legal support, appropriate trauma counselling and psychosocial care.

The EU would like to see us all collectively continue to build on and strengthen what is already in place. Furthermore, we must all acknowledge and address the necessity of partnerships and clear roles and responsibilities, as well as the close alignment of programmes. We must also ask ourselves the uncomfortable question of whose security and safety are being addressed and resourced, and whether there are things we are not yet doing, but need to be done. We heed the call of the Secretary-General to reinforce our efforts, with urgency, to prevent and protect more women, girls, men and boys from falling victim to those heinous crimes and we hope that others will join us in that fight.

A full version of this statement will be posted online.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Colombia.

Ms. Mejía Vélez (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): Given that this is my first statement with Peru as President, allow me to congratulate you, Sir, and to thank you for convening this open debate. I also thank the Deputy Secretary-General, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence and Conflict and, of course, Ms. Razia Sultana and her organization for their briefings today.

The Secretary-General's report (S/2018/250) before the Council highlights Colombia's efforts to make gender justice a central issue throughout its peace process and in its efforts to tackle cases of sexual violence in conflict. Colombia recognizes that the signing of the Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace does not actually constitute peace in itself, but it is a necessary step towards the changes that we need to bring about the peaceful and reconciled society that we in our region and the international community have so longed for.

Colombia has been adapting its constitutional framework to respond to the challenges that we face after more than 50 years of armed conflict, and the role of women will unquestionably be key to implementing it. In recognition of that, within our new institutions we have established a specialized gender unit, made up of women leaders, that will help us achieve the changes that the Peace Agreement identifies as needed in order to offer women — especially the rural women who were most affected by the decades of conflict on their land — better living conditions that can help to empower them and bring them the economic independence that can break the eternal cycle of violence that tramples on their rights.

The Peace Agreement establishes the creation of a comprehensive system of transitional justice that includes various legal and non-legal mechanisms. The members of those institutions were elected in September. For the first time in our country, 28 of the 51 judges in the Special Jurisdiction for Peace are women, and a woman now presides over the court. The missing persons search unit is led by a female director. Women compose 54 per cent of the comprehensive system, which reflects their interest and their right in applying the provisions of the Agreement related to gender. Colombia recognizes the need to ensure accountability for sexual violence crimes committed in the context of the conflict. That is why last month, the new director of the office for investigations and prosecutions indicated that the composition of that particular group is being worked on, with the aim of investigating all cases of sexual violence that occurred in the context of the armed conflict.

At this stage, we need to pay special attention to access to justice and reparations for victims of the armed conflict, because we cannot forget that 51 per cent of the officially registered victims of the armed conflict are women. That is why we have established a gender perspective as part of our targeted approach. We are applying the strategy of individual reparations for female victims of sexual violence, not just in the Special Jurisdiction but also with regard to ordinary cases, and we are making enormous efforts to emphasize that and to resolve every case.

Colombia is firmly committed and feels a tremendous responsibility to the international community and our own communities. As the Special Representative said this morning, the story of sexual violence and war has been a story of denial. Nothing can be resolved through silence. That is why we persevere in our efforts — so that services, justice and reparations can reach the survivors of conflict-related sexual violence.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Spain.

Ms. Bassols Delgado (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): We align ourselves with the statements delivered earlier by the observer of the European Union and by the representative of Canada, on behalf of the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security.

As we do every year, we are meeting once again to address a problem as old, and yet as current, as sexual violence in conflict. The Council has developed a vast regulatory corpus in the area, and this may be one of the topics of our open debates that Member States agree on most readily. So what is still preventing the effective implementation of resolutions, international humanitarian law and international human rights law? From time to time it is suggested that the women and peace and security agenda and the issue of sexual violence in conflict do not belong at the centre of the Council's activity. The prevalence and consequences of such issues are underestimated. Nevertheless, the fact that we are witnessing worrying patterns of sexual violence in a recent and rapidly unfolding humanitarian crisis such as that affecting Myanmar's Rohingya population confirms once again that this agenda represents a central challenge to international peace and security. This paradigm shift in the classic concept of security should therefore have immediate practical consequences.

Spain is grateful to the Peruvian presidency for organizing this open debate in connection with the prevention efforts on the United Nations agenda. We appreciate the commitment of the Deputy Secretary-General and of Special Representative Pramila Patten and the contribution and courage of Ms. Razia Sultana in particular. Testimonies like hers are vital to preventing the normalization of sexual violence as an inevitable consequence of war.

Much has been said in this debate on the prevention of sexual violence in conflict. I would like to add some thoughts and proposals. With regard to root causes, who are the primary victims of sexual violence in conflict situations? In a majority of cases they are women and girls who are economically and politically marginalized. That is true whether we are speaking of the women and girls of the Central African Republic, those in Kivu, the Kasais or Tanganyika in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Yazidis in Iraq or the Rohingya in Myanmar, where there has even been talk of ethnic cleansing. We must address the root causes — inequality and the absence of women's empowerment and participation — and we must respond to early warnings. The Council has the necessary tools if it chooses to use them — the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security, peace operations' mandates, the work of women protection counsellors, and sanctions, to name a few. I therefore urge Council members to address the issue of sexual violence in the context of their next visit to Myanmar and Bangladesh.

Spain believes that we must make the fight against sexual violence in conflict a priority in every context. We observe how sexual violence is sometimes a factor in forced displacements in places such as Colombia, Iraq and Syria. The risk does not disappear in refugee camps, and fear of sexual assault prevents many displaced people from returning to their communities. The case of the Rohingya is particularly worrisome. We believe that the negotiations on the global compact on refugees would provide a good opportunity for addressing sexual violence in those contexts. Let us take advantage of that opportunity and those negotiations.

Resolution 2331 (2016) recognizes the nexus between sexual violence and human trafficking during conflicts. It also explores the use of sexual violence as a terrorism tactic employed by certain groups and includes it among their possible sources of financing. We find it surprising, as many representatives have pointed out today, that to date no member of Da'esh or Boko Haram has been prosecuted for sexual assault. Nor have we made progress in acknowledging the victims of sexual violence as victims of terrorism or conflict in such contexts.

We must fight stigmatization. The fear of ostracism is even greater when the victim is a man or a boy, and is exacerbated by the fact that many countries do not see men as possible victims of sexual violence. We therefore suggest that this perspective be taken into account in cooperation projects and humanitarian assistance. That was one of the topics addressed at the recent meeting in Berlin of the Women, Peace and Security National Focal Points Network, which my country established in 2016 and which is chaired by Germany this year. The meeting also included a specific session on accountability for crimes of sexual violence as a central element in preventing conflicts.

In order to achieve implementation of the resolutions on sexual violence in conflict, the specialized knowledge of the expert panels of the Sanctions Committees, mediators and negotiators of any peace process, the military, the United Nations Police and the humanitarian actors is essential. The Security Council can and must do much more in that area, for example by including specific listing criteria on sexual violence in all sanctions regimes and ensuring subsequent follow-up.

In the area of training, Spain has worked to strengthen guidance for its security-sector personnel. We also provide such training to other countries, such as Palestine and Colombia, and contribute to the United Nations initiative against sexual violence in conflict among the other projects outlined in our second national action plan for the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000), which includes specific measures to combat sexual violence, including in the humanitarian field.

Finally, impunity today breeds impunity tomorrow. It must be addressed through mechanisms for improving the preservation of evidence, which require specialized knowledge. The prosecution of two landmark cases in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the judgment of the International Criminal Court in the case of Bosco Ntaganda, not only strengthens the victims' trust in justice but also deters possible perpetrators.

The United Nations must lead by example. I propose that we all work to better implement the zero-tolerance policy of the United Nations on sexual exploitation and abuse and that we prevent and fight sexual violence, the most silent crime in armed conflicts. We owe that to the thousands of victims who have suffered and continue to live with the consequences.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Begeç (Turkey): At the outset, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for organizing today's open debate. We also thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2018/250) and the Deputy Secretary-General for her presentation this morning. We would also like to express our appreciation to Special Representative of the Secretary-General Patten and Ms. Sultana for their briefings.

Unfortunately, the Secretary-General's annual report describes continuing concerns, as well as a number of new and emerging ones, with regard to the use of sexual violence as a tactic of war, terrorism, torture and repression, and as a means of persecution. Sexual violence significantly aggravates the severe effects of conflicts. Moreover, the nexus between conflict-related sexual violence and terrorism, human trafficking and organized crime further worsens its impact. Such trends and emerging concerns require a robust international response. We reiterate that the prevention of sexual violence should constitute an integral part of wider efforts to prevent conflict.

Sexual and gender-based violence has been a devastating feature of the conflict in Syria since it began.

Unfortunately, millions of Syrians, particularly women and girls, continue to live under the threat of sexual violence from various parties on the ground. The report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic published last month, entitled "'I lost my dignity': Sexual and gender-based violence in the Syrian Arab Republic" (A/HRC/37/72/CRP.3), is a frank illustration of the horrific acts of sexual violence perpetrated by the Syrian regime and associated militias, as well as terrorist organizations, including the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK), the Democratic Union Party (PYD) and the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG). We believe that when depicting the disturbing nature of sexual violence inflicted in Syria, it is essential to refrain from adopting a selective and limited approach to sampling the perpetrators. That is particularly important to avoid creating the impression that the international community might overlook particular acts of sexual violence committed there. In that understanding, I would like to read an excerpt from paragraph 90 of the report, in connection with acts of sexual violence committed by the PKK/PYD/YPG terrorist organization in Syria, which is collectively identified as "Syrian Democratic Forces" (SDF).

> "Torture of male detainees, however, including the burning of and threats to burn genitals, was documented in 2017. In one such incident in June 2017, in an SDF detention facility in Al-Tabga (ar-Raqqa), males were reportedly subjected to burning of their genitals with cigarette lighters during interrogation."

That paragraph, along with two others in the report, speaks clearly to the mindset and tactics used by the PKK/PYD/YPG terrorist organization, which resorts to torture and sexual violence in detention centres in areas under its control, as has been confirmed by independent organizations and United Nations investigative bodies.

As a neighbouring country that has maintained an open-door policy for Syrians fleeing war and violence in their own country, Turkey now hosts more than 3.5 million Syrians, 1.6 million of whom are women. Empowering and ensuring self-reliance for Syrian women and young people in particular, with no tolerance of sexual and gender-based violence, is crucially important to us. That is why we make every effort to provide security and safety for them, including through partnership with the United Nations Population Fund.

The findings of the Secretary-General's report on the situation of the Rohingya in Myanmar are also disturbing, and there are other credible reports that concur with them. First of all, the international community expects the Government of Myanmar to create the conditions necessary for peaceful coexistence in Rakhine state and for the safe return of refugees. That means ending every kind of violence, including sexual violence, giving humanitarian agencies immediate and unhindered access to the populations in need and implementing international humanitarian law and international human rights law in Rakhine state. Bringing the alleged perpetrators of sexual and other violence to justice will also be critically important to ending any repetitions of that vicious cycle.

The increasing numbers of protracted conflicts, forced displacements and humanitarian emergencies create an environment that is conducive to the trafficking of women and girls. Trafficking often involves sexual violence and exploitation. Turkey attaches the utmost importance to the fight against human trafficking, which constitutes a violation of human rights and an offence to the dignity and integrity of human beings. In that regard, we recall the importance of resolution 2331 (2016), of which Turkey was a sponsor. Among other things, an effective and resolute response to conflict-related sexual violence requires empowering women and girls, promoting gender equality and ensuring access to justice and accountability for such crimes. It also needs the political will and concerted action of the international community as a whole.

Allow me to conclude by underscoring that Turkey remains determined to continue to contribute to international efforts aimed at addressing this challenge.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Ms. Lodhi (Pakistan): My delegation commends your effort, Mr. President, in organizing this open debate on an issue of critical importance. We thank Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Ms. Pramila Patten, for their informative briefings this morning.

For far too long, sexual violence has remained a grim and inevitable reality of armed conflicts, which has often been employed systematically and with impunity, to coerce, punish, humiliate and instil fear among the targeted civilian population. Even as the international community has come together to collectively condemn such acts of unimaginable horror, sexual abuse of women and girls continues to be used as a tactic of war in conflicts around the world. While sexual violence remains a designated war crime and a crime against humanity, for survivors its impact goes well beyond the ordeal of the harrowing experience itself. Stigma and marginalization often outlast the conflict, and the trauma haunts survivors for the rest of their lives. The recent report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence (S/2018/250) rightly emphasizes how the effects of such violence can echo across generations.

The Security Council has been proactively taking up this issue under its women and peace and security agenda. The legal framework and institutional focus are in place, but complicated geopolitics around various conflicts and divisions within the Chamber have allowed perpetrators to continue to carry out these heinous atrocities with impunity. From Myanmar to my own country's neighbourhood, the world continues to watch in horror as several State and non-State actors employ rape and sexual abuse as a deliberate policy to subdue and oppress entire populations. A lack of verifiable and independent reporting from many of these hotspots is letting those who commit and condone these acts go scot-free.

In order to combat impunity for these crimes and protect women and girls from systematic abuse, the international community needs to recalibrate and revisit its response. Let me make four specific points in that regard.

First, the Security Council, as the primary body tasked with the maintenance of international peace and security, should focus on addressing the root causes of conflict to remove the breeding grounds for such crimes.

Secondly, mechanisms to independently investigate and verify reports emerging from conflict situations where sexual violence is taking place are critical to dealing with the challenge.

Thirdly, we must also take concrete steps to enhance the capacity of national institutions and improve criminal justice systems in countries facing armed conflict.

Fourthly, justice does not only mean punishment for the perpetrators. It also means redress for the survivors. Victim protection and rehabilitation should remain a top priority. The stigma attached to victimhood must be redirected towards the perpetrators. They are the ones who should be made an example of, not just as a matter of retribution but also as a preventive measure.

My country has always advocated the integration of the gender perspective into the peacebuilding paradigm to promote the cause of sustaining peace. As one of the world's leading troop-contributing countries, Pakistan has set the highest standards in fulfilling peacekeeping mandates, including protecting vulnerable segments of the population, especially women and children, from violence. We fully support the Secretary-General's zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse. Pakistan was among the first countries to sign the Secretary-General's voluntary compact on the subject. We have also contributed to the Trust Fund in Support of Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.

To share our experience and promote best practices in peacekeeping, we have established a United Nations peacekeeping training institute in Pakistan, which offers specially designed modules to help peacekeepers respond effectively and protect innocent civilians from sexual violence. We also believe that increasing participation by female peacekeepers and encouraging more women to take up mediation roles will help in the stabilization and reconstruction phase of post-conflict rehabilitation.

For my country, protecting the vulnerable, including women and children, is not only a global peace and security imperative. More important, this is an obligation of humanity. We remain resolute and steadfast in our commitment.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Norway.

Mr. Sætre (Norway): I make this statement on behalf of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Sweden and my own country, Norway.

At the outset, I would like to thank Peru for organizing this important debate. Sexual violence is increasingly being used as a weapon or a tactic of war. We know that domestic violence also increases as tensions in society grow. The chaos of conflict often prepares the ground for further unreported and unprosecuted abuse.

Women are always vulnerable in conflict. Violent extremists often target women specifically and strategically, undermining women's rights and security. Sexual violence makes up a significant part of extremist violence. Sexual violence is often seen as inevitable in conflict. We do not agree. That attitude encourages impunity and silences survivors.

The challenges are immense and include insufficient protection mechanisms, inadequate rule of law, weak judicial systems, poor services for survivors, stigmatization of victims and witnesses, structural discrimination and economic and social inequalities. Conflict-related sexual violence is a violation of both international human rights law and international humanitarian law. It can be a war crime, a crime against humanity or an act of genocide. The International Criminal Court plays a vital role in the fight against impunity, but States have the primary duty to prevent and investigate cases and to prosecute the perpetrators. Strengthening the capacity of national institutions, both during peacetime and in conflict, is therefore critical.

Sexual violence is eroding the societies we are striving to stabilize and rebuild. It is destroying the future as well as the present for many more than the women and girls, men and boys directly affected. Preventing and responding to sexual- and gender-based violence is a priority for the Nordic countries. In our mediation work, we strive to ensure that victims are heard and that amnesty for sexual crimes is not accepted. We are working hard to increase the number of women deployed to international operations, because we believe that diverse teams deliver better. We train all our personnel to ensure that those who are entrusted with people's lives can in fact be trusted. We contribute specialized police teams to United Nations peace operations.

Together with the United Nations, we are developing a whole-of-mission handbook for United Nations operations on how to prevent and respond to conflict-related sexual violence. We cooperate with the African Union and the Special Envoy of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission on Women, Peace and Security, Ms. Bineta Diop, supporting the life-saving services provided by the United Nations Population Fund to survivors, and the efforts of UN-Women and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to ensure a gendered humanitarian response. We work with Ms. Patten, the Group of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict and United Nations Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict, and we support Justice Rapid Response and UN-Women's training of experts, as well as the Gender Standby Capacity. Our civil society partners provide psychosocial and legal support and engage in livelihood programmes. Moreover, our academic partners provide knowledge that informs our policy decisions.

The Nordic countries underscore the pivotal importance of gender equality and women's empowerment, as highlighted in the concept note (S/2018/311, annex).

Without the full and effective participation of women at all levels, we will not be able to prevent conflict-related sexual violence or respond effectively. We need a broad, coordinated response. The Call to Action on Protection from Gender-based Violence in Emergencies, the Women, Peace and Security National Focal Points Network and the emerging alliance of networks of women mediators are all important steps in the right direction. Today's discussion is not about victims but survivors, who are entitled to protection and justice. They must be enabled to participate in rebuilding their societies. Only then will peace be sustainable.

A longer version of this statement will be available online.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Japan.

Mr. Hoshino (Japan): I would like to begin by joining others in thanking the briefers for their important insights. I will abridge my remarks today in the light of the time constraints, and would therefore like to ask participants to refer to the website to see Japan's full statement.

Japan is seriously concerned about the fact that sexual violence continues to be used as a tactic of war, and we condemn such acts in the strongest terms. We must put an end to sexual violence. In preventing and deterring sexual violence, we should reflect on its root causes, such as discrimination against women and gender inequality. It is crucial that we support the efforts of the United Nations and its States Members to obtain political commitments from the parties to conflicts to addressing these causes, and to ensure that those commitments are implemented. In that regard, Japan commends the important collaboration both on joint communiqués and national action plans between the Office of the Special Representative of the

Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict and relevant countries.

Economic and political empowerment is one surefire way to prevent and deter sexual violence. Women cannot be seen merely as victims of conflict; they are active peacebuilders and safeguards against violent extremism. Empowering women enhances the resilience of families, communities, regions and beyond. Japan believes that the most effective contribution that donors can make is to women's empowerment. With that in mind, through UN-Women, we recently decided to provide additional financial assistance of around $18 million for women's empowerment and leadership programmes where they are needed most.

Last year we witnessed various instances of the liberation of territories from armed groups, and the release or escape of women and girls who had been held by such groups, which shed light on the cruel realities that affect women and girls in conflicts and the growing and urgent need to ensure accountability for the perpetrators of such acts and justice for their survivors. Putting an end to a conflict does not necessarily mean putting an end of sexual violence. If the perpetrators are free or remain in power, the stigma will never end, and that can lead to distrust of Government. Where there is impunity, people may seek their own retribution, which in turn can easily result in relapses into conflict.

In order to address the complex issues related to accountability, we must work to ensure the establishment of a rule of law and justice system that is responsive to gender in conflict and post-conflict settings. Since 2014, Japan has been financially supporting the work of the Team of Experts in the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, which is being effectively deployed in some of the world's most challenging contexts and is delivering practical results. For example, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is a priority country for Japan and the Team of Experts. As the country's current situation is a difficult one, we have set up seven specialized units on sexual violence. They provide training, mentoring, infrastructure and technical support for judicial investigations and mobile courts and have brought qualitative and quantitative improvements in the judicial response to sexual violence. Between 1 January and 31 October 2017, these units registered 1,726 cases of sexual and gender-based violence that have so far resulted in 643 judgments and represent the first-ever concrete data on accountability for sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

In conclusion, we need concrete interventions with concrete results, based on the concept of human security. It is never too late for justice and accountability. However, the sooner they come, the sooner the healing can start and the sooner a sense of dignity can be restored to survivors. Japan calls on the international community to unite and take concrete actions as steadily and as quickly as possible. Japan will always be a part of that effort.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Mexico.

Mr. Sandoval Mendiolea (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mexico affirms that sexual violence in conflict, whether it is a tactic of war, an act of terrorism or criminal violence, is an abhorrent act and a flagrant and unacceptable violation of international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

We appreciate Peru's convening of today's open debate, given how urgent it is that we analyse the most effective and sustainable ways to prevent and address sexual violence in conflict, such as through the empowerment of women, the promotion of gender equality and efforts to ensure access to justice and accountability for the commission of such crimes.

Sexual violence in conflict does not occur spontaneously, and can therefore be prevented if States make full use of all the tools at their disposal to empower women and girls and strengthen their protection and access to justice. In investing in women as essential promoters of peace and security, we must bear in mind that from a prevention perspective, every national and international effort to address sexual violence in conflict should be made in recognition of the virtuous circle that exists between sustainable peace, development, the rule of law and human rights.

Sustainable peace is not possible without the comprehensive participation and consideration of the needs and perspectives of women and girls. The systematic exclusion of girls from schooling leads to discrimination and is at the root of women's marginalization in political, economic and social life. Such marginalization is one of the most obvious structural causes of conflict and creates fertile ground for sexual violence. Girls must be empowered in the family and in school in relation to boys; women must be empowered with equality in relation to men and to society in general. Empowered women, respected in their society, are crucial to building a healthy, equitable and inclusive social fabric in which the same human rights for all are promoted and respected. Communities based on gender equity will always be more resilient in the face of every kind of conflict or expression of violence.

Mexico has integrated a gender perspective into its national development plans as one of its main directions for action, enabling the necessary resources to be allocated to it in the national budget. Our long-term national initiatives include a national programme for equality and non-discrimination aimed at mainstreaming a gender perspective into all Government programmes, actions and policies with a view to guaranteeing women's rights. At the federal level, our Government is coordinating efforts with local authorities, the private sector, civil society and academia aimed at advancing the Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in a comprehensive and timely manner, including all the targets of Sustainable Development Goal 5.

Crises do not discriminate with regard to gender, and armed conflict has a particular impact on women and girls. Mexico recognizes the importance of including them in mediation processes and process for building, strengthening and sustaining peace, and believes that it is vital to ensure they participate in prevention, reconstruction and national reconciliation efforts. Their access to justice is crucial, and establishing protection mechanisms for women and girls should therefore be a norm in every legal system.

The resolutions adopted by the Security Council on women and peace and security have helped to strengthen the normative architecture of that agenda. The challenge now lies in achieving its effective, consistent and cross-cutting implementation across the entire United Nations system and by Member States in order to eliminate the marginalization of women that still exists when it comes to making decisions on peace and security.

Mexico has joined the Secretary-General's voluntary compact on preventing and addressing sexual abuse committed by United Nations staff on the ground. In that regard, we should point out that the privileges and immunities of the Organization cannot and must not be seen as a factor in impunity. That is why we call on the Council to implement a stronger and more effective mechanism for monitoring national proceedings related to sexual violence committed by staff deployed under the United Nations flag, as well as other officials and experts on mission, in order to combat impunity.

As an international community, we must acknowledge that sanctions are one of the most effective ways of punishing perpetrators of sexual violence and ensuring that they never commit such acts again. However, sanctions imposed by the Council will continue to have a limited impact when it comes to combating sexual violence in conflict if they are not strengthened through cooperation, both within and outside the United Nations system, on investigating and documenting these types of war crimes in an impartial and effective manner.

Prevention, as the Secretary-General has pointed out on several occasions, involves the empowerment of women and girls in society. A society cannot be healthy when the needs of half of its members are ignored. There can be no sustainable peace without women's full participation in our societies.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Estonia.

Mr. Jürgenson (Estonia): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's meeting on this vital topic. We were impressed by the comprehensive statements by Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed, Special Representative Pramila Patten and Ms. Razia Sultana.

Estonia aligns itself with the statement delivered earlier by the observer of the European Union and reiterates its commitment to fighting gender-based violence, including sexual violence.

Sexual violence is among the gravest violations of human rights. Its impact ranges from immediate to multiple long-term physical and mental consequences for women and girls, men and boys. It also has very negative consequences for their families, communities, societies and countries as a whole. But it is not inevitable. There are ways to prevent it. We fully support the Secretary-General's recommendation in his latest report (S/2018/250) to give due consideration to early-warning signs of sexual violence when monitoring conflict situations. If we fail to act early, the human, political and economic costs can be devastating, as we know all too well. That calls for a more alert, coordinated and comprehensive approach by States Members and the United Nations system.

It is crucial to support survivors of sexual violence with adequate services so that they can rebuild their lives. Survivors should also always be given the option of documenting their cases for future accountability processes. In that regard, the role of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in ensuring the effective investigation and prosecution of sexual and gender-based crimes cannot be emphasized enough. The work of UN-Women and Justice Rapid Response is also important, since its joint expert roster has been an effective tool for deploying experts to investigate and document sexual violence in conflict-driven zones.

Estonia is fully committed to tackling gender-based violence and has put in place a comprehensive development strategy for the period from 2015 to 2020 for reducing violence domestically. It lays out concrete activities for reducing and preventing violence in its various forms, including sexual violence. Globally, Estonia has been a strong supporter of Special Representative Pramila Patten and her mandate. We are also proud to be a consistent contributor to the ICC Trust Fund for Victims, which alleviates suffering for survivors of violence.

I would also like to emphasize the important role of civil society. While intergovernmental cooperation is extremely significant, we need to ensure that everyone is heard. Civil-society and non-governmental organizations, and women's organizations in particular, can provide new insight and data that could otherwise be missed. It is therefore very important to ensure that non-governmental organizations have larger platforms and more access to United Nations meetings and forums. That would unquestionably help us to ensure that every detail is accounted for in achieving our goals related to ending conflict-related sexual violence.

Our experience has shown that national action plans for implementing resolution 1325 (2000), on women and peace and security, are essential in raising awareness of the need for the inclusion of women in conflict prevention and sustainable peacebuilding. Estonia is currently implementing its second national action plan, which was created and is being implemented jointly with non-governmental organizations.

A fundamental lesson that we have learned from experience and from the Secretary-General's reports is the sheer level of detail that we have to deal with in addressing sexual violence in conflict-driven zones. Let us work together, domestically and globally, to put an end to sexual violence forever.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Slovakia.

Mr. Mlynár (Slovakia): My delegation associates itself with the statement delivered earlier by the observer of the European Union.

I would like to thank you and your delegation, Mr. President, for organizing today's important debate on women and peace and security, with a special focus on preventing sexual violence in conflict through empowerment, gender equality and access to justice. It is crucial that the Security Council continue to address various aspects of conflicts within the framework of thematic debates. Today's debate also contributes significantly to the systematic advancement of the women and peace and security agenda in the work and decision-making of the Security Council.

Slovakia considers prevention to be the cornerstone of United Nations efforts aimed at peacebuilding and sustaining peace. The women and peace and security agenda, together with the goals of inclusivity and gender equality, definitely fits into the Secretary-General's broader prevention agenda. The women and peace and security agenda will also be instrumental in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 5 and SDG 16, which recognize gender equality, as well as peace, justice and strong institutions, as a global development priority.

We would like to thank the Secretary-General for his recent report on special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (A/72/751), and commend his commitment and leadership, not only where the women and peace and security agenda is concerned but also as shown by his efforts to implement a zero-tolerance policy with regard to sexual exploitation and abuse. Having the right information is often the first step towards achieving our goals. For that reason, we welcomed the launch of a dedicated website, in August 2017, and the system-wide response to sexual exploitation and abuse, as well as the development of a repository of national laws on sexual exploitation and abuse by the Special Coordinator on Improving the United Nations Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.

The high-level meeting convened last September provided important momentum, with the establishment of the Circle of Leadership on the prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse in United Nations operations. The President of Slovakia, His Excellency Mr. Andrej Kiska, is a proud member of the Circle.

Slovakia has also signed the voluntary compact on preventing and addressing sexual exploitation and abuse and made a financial contribution to the United Nations Trust Fund for victims of sexual exploitation and abuse last year. We encourage all Member States to show their solidarity with victims and commit to eradicating the scourge by signing the compact and providing financial support as needed and where possible. We are of the view that a meeting proposed by the Secretary-General to be convened on the sidelines of the general debate during the next session of the General Assembly will contribute to building momentum and raising the visibility of issues relating to the empowerment of women and the fight against sexual exploitation and abuse.

Slovakia fully supports the approach of the Secretary-General, reiterated in his most recent report (S/2018/250), which is based on prioritizing the rights and dignity of victims. Member States, in particular troop-contributing countries (TCCs) and police-contributing countries (PCCs) must continue to work closely with the United Nations in order to combat impunity and hold perpetrators accountable. Slovakia is a TCC and PCC that fully cooperates with the Secretary-General.

The Security Council should look more closely at the possibility of referring cases deemed to be particularly important to the International Criminal Court, for example those involving gender-based crimes. The solid case law of international criminal tribunals relating to sexual violence can and should also be used in national proceedings against alleged perpetrators. It is equally important to address the root causes of the scourge. The Secretary-General has quite rightly stated in his report that weak State institutions, in particular justice systems, exacerbate those factors and can contribute to a climate of impunity. In a broad sense, justice systems, including investigative bodies, must adopt non-discriminatory and gender-sensitive approaches. We must not forget the importance of providing easily accessible legal aid to victims. In that regard, civil society plays a crucial role.

As co-Chair of the Group of Friends of Security Sector Reform, Slovakia wishes to recall resolution 2151 (2014) on the issue of security sector reform, which underscores the importance of women's equal and effective participation and full involvement in all stages of security sector reform processes. A gender-sensitive security sector is key to developing security sector institutions that are non-discriminatory, representative of the population and capable of effectively responding to the specific security needs of diverse groups, thereby playing a crucial role in prevention. Reforming the security sector must also include the reform of recruitment processes and an improvement in the delivery of security services to address and prevent sexual and gender-based violence.

In conclusion, the international community is facing unprecedented challenges to global peace and security. Civilians, including women and girls who are often the most vulnerable, pay the highest price as they face systematic violence and oppression. There is no doubt that we must redouble our efforts to effect changes on the ground, in particular in favour of women and girls and societies in regions and countries affected by conflict.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Italy.

Mr. Biagini (Italy): At the outset I would like to commend the Peruvian presidency for convening today's debate, in particular for the angle it has chosen. I also thank the briefers for their insightful and informative contributions.

Italy aligns itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union and with that by delivered by the representative of Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security.

Our concerns about the use of sexual and gender-based violence have deepened for two reasons: first, the widespread and systematic use of sexual violence by terrorists and violent extremist groups and, secondly, the increased vulnerability of migrants, in particular women and girls, to trafficking for the purposes of sexual and other forms of exploitation. Women and girls fleeing conflict must be afforded safe passage and protection, including from sexual and gender-based violence, while in transit and at their final destinations.

It is for those reasons that last year Italy promoted the adoption by the Council of resolution 2388 (2017), which further explored the nexus between trafficking in persons and conflict-related sexual violence, as outlined in resolutions 2242 (2015) and 2331 (2016), with a special focus on the trafficking of children in conflict situations. We encourage the Security Council to continue to monitor those issues and ensure follow-up to those resolutions.

Conflict-related sexual violence can be prevented and more effectively addressed through the empowerment of women, gender equality and accountability for the crimes perpetrated. First, empowering women is key to any strategy that aims to help women take control of their lives and prevent them from falling prey to sexual violence in conflict. In keeping with the Secretary-General's commitment to women's leadership and gender equality, as a vital element of its prevention agenda Italy launched the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network. As we all know, the Mediterranean region, key to international peace and security, is currently facing several threats, including violent extremism and transnational organized crime, human trafficking and humanitarian emergencies.

In that environment, women can help countries prevent conflicts and strengthen national reconciliation processes by ensuring a gender and inclusive perspective on issues, such as security, justice and governance, which are often the root causes of violent conflicts. The goal of the Network is to increase the number of women involved in peacemaking efforts and facilitate the appointment of women mediators and special envoys at the local and international level, in particular in the Mediterranean region.

With regard to accountability, prevention fails if there are no consequences for sexual and gender-based violence. At the national level we must assist Governments in strengthening accountability for such crimes. That is the approach we are taking, for example, with the Centre of Excellence for Stability Police Units in Vicenza, which provides high quality training and specialized courses for peacekeepers on the prevention and investigation of sexual and gender-based violence. At the global level, the Statute of the International Criminal Court expressly lists various forms of sexual and gender-based crimes as underlying acts of both crimes against humanity and war crimes. In that regard, we welcome the recent surrender of Al Hassan Ag Abdoul Aziz Ag Mohamed Ag Mahmoud, wanted for crimes against humanity and war crimes in Mali, including rape, forced marriage and sexual slavery. If properly supported, including by the Council, justice can become a relevant deterrent for human rights violations.

The Council can also do so by imposing targeted sanctions against individuals who have committed sexual violence. For example, in January 2017 sexual and gender-based violence was included as a standalone designation criterion in the renewal of sanctions in the Central African Republic. The Security Council could certainly deter such crimes by imposing targeted sanctions. However, it is necessary to ensure that sanctions are effectively implemented in order to increase the cost of allowing or using sexual violence in conflict. Only when the cost of the weapon of sexual violence becomes visibly more expensive to its perpetrators will there be a significant step towards the eradication and prevention of the scourge.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Switzerland.

Ms. Baumann (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I thank you, Sir, for convening today's debate, which allows us to reflect on the best strategies to prevent sexual violence in conflict. Switzerland has always advocated a preventive approach with regard to conflict and violence. By preventing sexual violence, we not only protect individuals from one of the most brutal forms of violence; we also protect entire societies. The good news is that the tools needed to implement a preventive approach, such as access to justice, gender equality and empowerment are all well-known and at our disposal.

First, allow me to address access to justice, which remains a major challenge for all survivors of sexual violence, especially in places affected by conflict, where judicial systems are weak or non-existent. The widespread fear of reprisals and stigma discourages victims from coming forward. Law enforcement agencies are therefore important partners in the fight against violence. That is why Switzerland supports police and armed forces by training them in compliance with legislation and taking victim-centred approaches in the handling cases of sexual violence.

The first step is often to increase public trust in the police. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, we have been lending our support to the police in holding open-door days for the local people. In Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Nepal, Switzerland has worked with local police forces to set up special police units to deal with cases of family sexual and gender-based violence. Switzerland has also prioritized efforts to support the review of national laws, promote legal aid and provide survivors with psychosocial counselling throughout the judicial process. We also encourage and support efforts to improve the documentation of rape and other forms of sexual violence against men and boys in situations of armed conflict to more effectively deal with such crimes.

Secondly, I would like to turn to gender equality as the principle means of prevention. There is a strong empirical connection between the lack of gender equality in a society and the readiness to take up arms. A thorough analysis of the dynamics of gender equality can therefore help to design tailor-made programmes to prevent conflicts from breaking out. For that reason, Switzerland's fourth national action plan on women, peace and security will also focus on promoting gender-responsive security sector reform and the deployment of mixed teams in military and police units. The national action plan further recognizes the need for women's economic empowerment as a precondition for equal participation in peacebuilding. However, it is not enough to simply focus on empowering women; initiatives need to gain the support of all family members to advocate women's financial independence.

Thirdly, I would now like to speak on empowerment. We are not talking only about women's empowerment. Men also need empowerment and education in order to transform traditional gender-relations and put an end to harmful behavioural patterns. It is crucial to include men and boys, whether as allies, potential victims, perpetrators and champions for gender-equality, in any conflict and violence prevention strategy.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Indonesia.

Ms. Krisnamurthi (Indonesia): Indonesia would like to thank you, Mr. President, for sustaining this important dialogue on women and peace and security. Indonesia greatly appreciates all the briefers for their remarks.

One of the persistent challenges that today's debate is reminding us of is sexual violence in conflict. Indonesia is deeply concerned about the use of sexual violence as a war tactic. As the Secretary-General's report (S/2018/250) emphasizes, anyone becomes susceptible to sexual violence during conflict, regardless of their sex. Women and girls in particular have been exploited by the warring parties, yet women have articulated their desire to move past victimization and take the lead to improve their own situation and in the broader scope, despite being victims of horrible acts, having faced injustice or marginalized because of gender.

Indonesia welcomes the response of Member States, the United Nations and civil society. The international community's efforts have raised women's profiles as assets to peace. Since the Security Council's adoption of resolution 1325 (2000), the international community has built a robust framework in which women can exercise their role in peace and security. It is worth noting that the same resolution clearly mentions that effective steps to prevent and respond to all forms of sexual violence can significantly contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security. Along with constructive measures to increase women's roles in peace, the international community can still do much more. It must continue to condemn sexual violence in conflict, which requires greater efforts not only to put an end to it, but also to consider means to prevent such atrocities from taking place in the first place.

I would like to take this opportunity to share Indonesia's views regarding the prevention of sexual violence before, during and after conflict. First, there is no price that can be placed on human life. The human toll of conflict is devastating. For that reason, civil order must be preserved if conflict is imminent. Peaceful solutions must be actively pursued. More resources should be poured into prevention in order to rebalance the approach to peace and security, which has focused more on response actions.

Secondly, the value of the women and peace and security agenda in preventive measures will emerge through the empowerment of women to assume the confidence and capacity to access the policy-making process, which is a way for them to address their grievances and to make their contributions towards the betterment of their community and society. Action to elevate women's empowerment should be integrated into development planning, peacekeeping missions and humanitarian assistance,

Thirdly, prevention should be prioritized through better dissemination. Sharing knowledge and experiences of women ex-combatants, women peacekeepers, negotiators and the like to deter conflict should be supported. That is why it is important for us to have a system-wide United Nations approach or a platform to disseminate, share and exchange success stories in that regard.

Fourthly, women need to become self-sufficient. Whether before, during or after conflict, strengthening basic capacities of women, such as reading, writing and economic skills, can go a long way. Training should focus on developing skills that would help women build a structured livelihood to obtain a steady income. Indonesia has also been sharing our best practices and experiences in empowering women in leadership through South-South and triangular cooperation.

The many efforts the international community has made give Indonesia hope that there is sufficient momentum for women's participation in peace and security. However, women and peace and security should not be reduced to a women's issue. It takes both men and women to achieve gender equality, foster respectful relationships, support safer communities and become true partners for peace. The hearty cooperation of both women and men is essential to successfully tackle the many challenges on the Council's agenda. The frameworks and tools are there. We must now walk the talk.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Austria.

Mr. Kickert (Austria): Austria aligns itself with the statements made on behalf of the European Union, the Group of Friends on Women, Peace and Security and the Human Security Network.

We would like to thank Peru for convening this open debate and the briefers for their reports. Understanding the impact of armed conflict on women and girls is central to effectively address sexual violence, prevent its occurrence and protect those at risk. We will highlight four points in the context of this debate.

My first point concerns protecting minorities. Persons belonging to minorities encounter a high risk as targets of violence. That was exemplified to us today by the testimony of Ms. Razia Sultana from the Rohingya community of Myanmar. Equally appalling is the fact that Da'esh continues to traffic Iraqi Yazidi women and girls into and across Syria as part of its campaign targeting minorities. The patterns of violence against women and girls belonging to minorities are embedded in underlying structural conditions, including inequality, gender-based discrimination and neglect for the rights of persons belonging to minorities. As the sponsor of the resolutions on the rights of persons belonging to minorities at the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council, Austria stresses the obligation of States to protect minorities from violence and underlines the necessity of empowering women and girls belonging to minorities who are often particularly vulnerable. As Special Representative of the Secretary-General Patten stated today, empowerment is a main building block for protection. We also emphasize the relevance of early-warning and awareness-raising measures to tackle problems regarding the situations of minorities, including through the relevant United Nations mechanisms and bodies, as well as regional organizations.

My second point involves countering impunity. We must do much more to combat and prevent sexual violence directed against women. Women and girls are kidnapped, held captive as sex slaves and traded like goods or animals. The crimes committed against them amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. Those responsible simply have to be brought to justice. Austria wants to see all perpetrators, including Da'esh and Boko Haram fighters, held accountable for their repulsive acts of violence against women and girls. As Special Representative Patten said today, only by truly fighting impunity will we achieve a deterrence effect. In order to help establish accountability, Austria has supported and contributed financially to the creation of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011. We also anticipate that the investigative team to support domestic efforts to hold Da'esh accountable by collecting evidence in Iraq will soon generate actionable results.

The third point concerns preventing sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations peacekeepers. Reports of sexual exploitation and abuse by both military and civilian personnel in United Nations peacekeeping missions in recent years have increasingly tainted the reputation of the United Nations and undermined its credibility. Austria condemns such behaviour and welcomes the focus of the Secretary-General on that important issue and his initiatives in that regard. Austria will sign the Secretary-General's compact on the elimination of sexual exploitation. We also intend to include this subject in the curriculum of the United

Nations-certified course on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. The course is held on a regular basis at the Austrian Study Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution in Stadtschlaining and is attended by senior staff in United Nations peacekeeping from around the world.

The fourth point involves reintegrating survivors. Sexual violence in conflict has a significantly detrimental impact on individuals and communities. In all too many settings, victims and their children are stigmatized, discriminated against and rejected by their communities. An example of determined efforts to support the reintegration of survivors of sexual violence is the case of northern Uganda, where during the conflict with the Lord's Resistance Army many serious crimes, including various forms of sexual and gender-based violence, were committed. Since 2008, the Austrian Development Agency, together with the International Center for Transitional Justice, has implemented four consecutive projects with a focus on supporting ongoing work on transitional justice in Uganda, with the aim of reintegrating victims into their communities.

Against the background of my own professional experience, I also note the case of the conflict-related sexual violence that took place in Kosovo in the late 1990s, which is not mentioned in the Secretary-General's report (S/2018/250). It is important that every woman and girl who has experienced sexual violence is recognized, as such recognition may constitute the first step in a very difficult healing process to overcome the inconceivable traumas suffered.

Violence directed against women and girls has to be eradicated in all its forms. Sexual violence in conflict builds upon the structural violence and discrimination against women and girls, which is already present in peacetime. Against that backdrop, Austria recently launched a campaign, with a fund of €1 million, to support activities that oppose female genital mutilation and its effects.

Rest assured that we will continue our work to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women across the board, with a special focus on women and peace and security.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Belgium.

Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): Belgium fully aligns itself with the statements delivered by the observer of the European Union and by the representative of Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security. I make the following comments in my national capacity.

As well all know, the adoption of resolution 1325 (2000) was an important step towards recognizing women's role in conflict prevention, conflict management and peacebuilding. When, building on that initiative, the Security Council adopted resolution 1820 (2008) — almost 10 years ago to the day — it also took a long-awaited step forward in the struggle against sexual violence in conflict. Belgium, which was a non-permanent member of the Security Council at that time, has always attached great importance to the implementation of that historic resolution and its follow-up resolutions.

In July 2017, my country adopted its third national plan of action on women and peace and security. The plan sets forth six major goals intended to improve women' situation in conflict zones before and following conflicts. One of the six major objectives is explicitly intended to combat all forms of violence directed against women and girls, and, more specifically, sexual violence. Exactly as was the case with its precursors, the plan is to be implemented at the national level and within the framework of Belgium's foreign policy involving partner countries of the Belgian Development Cooperation, international organizations of which Belgium is a member and countries in which the Belgian armed forces are active, as well as countries with which we enjoy bilateral relations. Our policy is not solely limited to the area of Government. A report resuming the progress made in every goal set out in the plan of action is submitted annually to Parliament.

Beyond the national level, it is essential that we continue to work so that the women and peace and security agenda inform any new initiative involving conflict prevention, conflict management or peacekeeping. In that regard, Belgium welcomes the fact that the topic of women and peace and security is an integral part of the new joint proposals made by the European Union and NATO, announced in December 2017, and we encourage other regional initiatives to explicitly include that theme in their mandates, as well as in their efforts on the ground.

Despite the significant work that has been done, the struggle against sexual violence is far from over. As we speak, sexual violence against women and girls and men and boys continues in conflict zones throughout the world, and those responsible for such acts often go unpunished. Belgium is deeply concerned about the instances of sexual violence met with impunity mentioned in the report (S/2018/250) of the Secretary-General, and urges all parties concerned to follow his recommendations so as to bring justice the perpetrators, rehabilitate the victims of sexual violence and ensure that such violence is not repeated.

In conclusion, I underscore that Belgium will remain committed to this issue both at the national level and vis-à-vis the international community, thereby giving political and operational priority to the implementation of resolution 1820 (2008) and its follow-up resolutions. My country will also continue to support the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict. Lastly, in the event that we are elected as a non-permanent member of the Security Council for the period from 2019 to 2020, we pledge to continue to support and actively promote the women and peace and security agenda and its mandate, including the struggle against sexual violence in conflict situations within the framework of the decision-making process of the Council.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Egypt.

Ms. Abdelkawy (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this important debate. I would also like to thank Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed, Ms. Pramila Patten, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, and the representative of civil society for their valuable contributions.

The Secretary-General in his report this year (S/2018/250) mentions that the past few months have seen positive developments, the most important of which was the release of many women and girls by armed terrorist groups. However, those developments are coupled with challenges, the most important of which is the need to rehabilitate and reintegrate those women and girls into their societies.

Recently, terrorist groups have begun to use sexual violence as a tool to exploit religion or race or as a means of expanding control of territory. Egypt expresses its concern about the lack of accountability of terrorist groups, including the organization of Islamic State and Boko Haram, for sexual violence committed against women and girls in armed conflict areas. In this context, we would like to stress the following points.

First, we reiterate our call for the reports of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence to remain committed to the mandates issued in the Security Council resolutions, so that such mandates achieve their desired goals in armed conflict areas and post-conflict situations.

Second, effective development, the eradication of poverty and the economic empowerment of women and girls are factors that can help end sexual exploitation and abuse in armed conflict areas and post-conflict situations. We stress the important role of the donor community in that regard.

Third, we welcome the work of the United Nations Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict, in cooperation with the United Nations specialized funds, programmes and agencies, particularly with regard to building the capacities of States in armed conflict or post-conflict situations in the areas of investigation, prosecution, military justice, legislative reform, protection of witnesses and reparations. We welcome the work of the United Nations Action Network against Sexual Violence in Conflict. We call for coordinated work between the Team of Experts and the Network to improve the United Nations response to sexual violence in conflict areas.

Fourth, we welcome action by the United Nations to address conflict-related sexual violence, including by increasing the number of women protection advisers on the ground. In that regard, we have contributed female staff to the police and military components of United Nations missions in the Sudan and Western Sahara and to the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur since 2009.

Fifth, we support the efforts of the Special Coordinator on improving the United Nations response to sexual exploitation and abuse, within her mandate, to address cases of sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations personnel or personnel under the United Nations flag. We are committed to the zero-tolerance policy of the Secretary-General with regard to sexual exploitation crimes. We continue to work with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations to end all forms of violence against women in peace operations.

Sixth, the national curricula provided to peacekeeping troops during training should include guidance on how to deal with sexual violence. In that connection, the Cairo International Center for Conflict Resolution, Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding, in coordination with the Egyptian Ministry of Defence, includes the issue of combating sexual violence in armed conflict in the predeployment training of the Egyptian military, police or civilian personnel that take part in peacekeeping forces. The Center also offers such training to civilian, military and police elements from Arab and African States that take part in United Nations peacekeeping.

Seventh, we stress the need for concerted international efforts to build the capacities of local and religious leaders to raise awareness in societies and communities on the need to eliminate the stereotype and stigma of victims of sexual violence and their children. It is the perpetrators who should bear that stigma instead. The victims should not be criminalized. We commend the role of Al-Azhar Al-Sharif in rejecting the advisory opinions of terrorist groups on the status of women in conflict areas.

Eighth, there must be respect for culturally specific elements of States when dealing with victims of sexual violence — whether men or women — during armed conflict.

In conclusion, we call for renewed political and ethical commitment to the empowerment of women in conflict and post-conflict areas and States. Women are key contributors to transitions from conflict to development and from societies torn by armed conflict to sound societies able to achieve sustainable development.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Lithuania.

Mr. Oehri (Lithuania): At the outset, we thank the Peruvian presidency of the Security Council for convening an open debate on this important issue. We also welcome the comprehensive report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/250) and its recommendations. We also commend the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Pramila Patten, and her team for her dedication to combating and preventing sexual violence in conflict. We thank the Deputy Secretary-General and all briefers for their contribution.

Lithuania aligns itself with the statements delivered by the observer of the European Union and the representative of Canada, on behalf of the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security.

Time and again, since 2008, when Council resolution 1820 (2008) acknowledged sexual violence as a threat to security and an impediment to the restoration peace, we return to the security issue. Time and again, the Secretary-General's reports a sickening picture in 19 countries where rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy and other brutalities against women and men, girls and boys are employed by State and non-State actors as tactics of war and terrorism. Unstable political environments, continued armed clashes, weak State structures, a climate of impunity and stigmata related to sexual violence exacerbate an already grave situation. Yet, most sexual crimes do not even get reported. Particularly vulnerable are women in remote rural areas, as well as displaced and refugee populations that live beyond the protection of rule-of-law institutions.

The only way to effectively address this scourge is a comprehensive and integrated approach at the international, regional and national levels, which entails prevention, early warning, justice and accountability, the participation of women in political processes and political, social and economic empowerment. Lithuania continuously underlines the importance of the Secretary-General's efforts to emphasize conflict prevention, preventive diplomacy, peacebuilding and sustaining peace. The overarching priority of prevention should be at the forefront of our fight against sexual violence in conflict. We should look for early warning indicators to identify potential conflict situations.

Among the positive steps at the United Nations level, we would mention the efforts to engage with the listed national military and police forces for the development of action plans to address violations, the deployment of women protection advisers and the meaningful work of the United Nations Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict in providing assistance to Governments by strengthening their capacities. However, the perpetrators are too often left unpunished and crimes unresolved, which further fuels new cycles of violence.

We concur with the recommendation of the Secretary-General that sexual and gender-based violence should be systematically applied as designation criteria when adopting or renewing targeted sanctions in situations of armed conflict. Such a tool could be more widely used to deter sexual violence and to seek accountability. International justice mechanisms, such as the International Criminal Court, can also play a critical role.

To that end, having strong national institutions and an adequate judiciary and penal framework is essential, as is making sure that national civilian and military justice systems do not lack the capacity and expertise to prevent, investigate and prosecute sexual violence. Cooperation mechanisms, including through awareness-raising campaigns, action plans, capacity-building and shared good practices, should continue to actively promote effective responses to conflict-related sexual crimes. We commend the partnership between the Justice Rapid Response initiative and UN-Women. The deployment of justice experts from their joint roster to more than 50 missions greatly contributes to ending impunity for perpetrators.

Another vital issue that we should address is care for and the protection of survivors of sexual violence. Such violence affects entire generations, with the stigmatization of women and their children having lasting repercussions. Public, religious and community leaders can personally engage in helping to shift the stigma from the victims of sexual abuse to the perpetrators of those heinous crimes. Victims must have access to justice, accountability and redress mechanisms in order to ensure their reintegration into society and their economic empowerment.

Even the best tools that we have cannot tackle sexual violence in conflict if women continue to be on the sidelines of peace negotiations, peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction. Being an active advocate of gender equality and the empowerment of women, Lithuania already contributes to achieving those goals through various initiatives. While striving to deploy more gender-balanced peacekeeping troop contingents, Lithuania continuously encourages female military and police personnel to apply. Training is also crucial to raising awareness and to improving the implementation of gender aspects in peace operations. Before their deployment, Lithuanian peacekeepers therefore undertake high-quality training on human rights and gender-related issues, in particular. As a gender-responsive legal and judicial system constitutes one of the building blocks of a resilient society, Lithuania remains committed to ensuring accountability for sexual and gender-based violence in conflict through national and international mechanisms.

Moreover, the President of Lithuania, Mrs. Dalia Grybauskaitė, chairs the Council of Women World Leaders, a network that seeks to mobilize influential women leaders around the world for collective action on issues of critical importance to women. In June this year, the Women Political Leaders Summit will take place in Vilnius, where women from all over the world will discuss, among other issues, how women, particularly political leaders, can advance peace and security. We also commend a promising achievement — the establishment of the Women African Leaders Network — and encourage similar initiatives in other regions of the world.

In conclusion, all Member States should redouble their efforts to implement Sustainable Development Goal 5 on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls to become actors rather than victims in their societies. All countries should review and revoke any discriminatory laws and practices and challenge stereotypes that hinder women's empowerment. Only then, will the hard-won progress in the area of women's rights be maintained and continue to break the cycles of gender-based violence.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Iraq.

Mr. Bahr Aluloom (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): My delegation would like to congratulate Peru on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for this month. I would also like to thank Peru for organizing this open debate and to wish it every success, and the delegation of the Netherlands for its successful presidency of the Security Council last month.

I would also like to express my sincere thanks to Ms. Pramila Patten, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, for the important role that she and her team play in helping and empowering the female survivors of sexual violence and the victims of indiscriminate terrorism. We also thank Ms. Razia Sultana for her briefing and for the valuable information that she provided on the Rohingya.

Iraq continues to suffer some of the most dreadful terrorist organizations, which have committed heinous crimes against innocent people. These gangs have abducted thousands of citizens, including children and women whom they have enslaved and trafficked. Many have been raped and exposed to some of the worst and most humiliating and inhumane treatment ever.

Based on our responsibility to provide protection and accountability and to prosecute the perpetrators of such terrible crimes against the people of Iraq, we have adopted a number of practical measures, the most important of which was the signing of the joint communiqué between the Iraqi Government, represented by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict on 23 September 2016. That represented the beginning of a joint effort of Iraq and the United Nations to address the sexual violence and brutality committed by the terrorist Da'esh organization and to address some of the challenges faced by Iraq in ensuring accountability for such crimes and bringing the perpetrators to justice in line with the relevant Iraqi laws.

Pursuant to that agreement, Iraq has received international assistance to document and gather evidence of such crimes and strengthen the legal framework, thereby enabling the judicial authorities to find ways to compensate and support the survivors of rape and children conceived as a result. In accordance with the agreement, Ms. Zainab Hawa Bangura, former Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, and her team first visited Iraq from 25 February to 3 March 2017. That was followed by two more visits to Iraq by specialists from the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, the most recent of which took place from 21 July to 2 August 2017. They held formal meetings with the relevant bodies to discuss the joint plan of action expected to be implemented under the terms of the joint communiqué signed by the two parties.

That was followed by yet another important step along the same lines. In cooperation with its international partners, particularly the United Kingdom, Iraq conveyed a message to the Secretary-General on 9 August 2017, requesting international assistance. The Security Council adopted resolution 2379 (2017) on 21 September 2017, which will help Iraq to collect, preserve and store evidence of crimes committed in Iraq by perpetrators and to submit that evidence to the Iraqi judicial authorities so that they can carry out their judicial duties, including the prosecution of crimes of sexual violence, building judicial capacities, updating Iraqi law and ensuring accountability for perpetrators pertaining to Da'esh. Iraq has therefore taken an important step towards ensuring accountability, prosecuting the perpetrators of such crimes and treating victims fairly.

This year, the Prime Minister of Iraq, Mr. Haider Al Abadi, invited the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Ms. Pramila Patten, to pay a visit to Iraq. During her visit, the final draft of the executive plan of the joint communiqué signed between Iraq and the United Nations was put forward with a view to help in defining fields of technical cooperation with Iraqi entities to confront various dimensions of sexual violence in conflict. The visit was conducted successfully from 25 February to 5 March. The Special Representative was accompanied by Lord Ahmad, the Special Representative of the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict and the Minister of State for the Commonwealth and the United Nations. Ms. Patten met with the Prime Minister, as well as the Minister of Defence, the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, the President of the Supreme Judicial Council and religious leaders of all denominations and other stakeholders. The executive plan of the joint communiqué was launched, and a safe haven for female survivors was also inaugurated, the first such haven in Iraq. In this regard, the Iraqi Government commends the constructive cooperation and important role played by the Office of the Special Representative in assisting Iraq, particularly during the period following the liberation of all Iraqi cities from terrorist organizations.

Lastly, Iraq would like to thank all its partners who contributed effectively to the eradication of terrorist organizations, which have become a threat to all the nations of the world. The world has realized that everybody's interest lies in joint efforts to eradicate such terrorist groups, wherever they are, and to cooperate in drying up the sources of terrorism, and in bringing terrorists to justice, thereby ensuring victim redress and contributing to an international envirnment that is safe for all. Iraq expects from all of its international partners to continue providing support for the reconstruction process, as well as for the rehabilitation and empowerment of victims with a view to their reintegration into society.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I give the floor to the representative of Nigeria.

Mr. Itegboje (Nigeria): I thank the delegation of Peru for organizing today's open debate.

Our appreciation also goes to Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed for her remarks and far-reaching recommendations. We thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict and other briefers for sharing their perspective on this very important subject.

Nigeria condemns in the strongest terms the abduction, trafficking and maltreatment of women and girls by extremist groups, including the heinous activities of Boko Haram in the Lake Chad region, particularly in north-eastern Nigeria. The use of women and girls as sex slaves must also be equally condemned. In that regard, it is our expectation that this debate will offer suggestions to address the prevailing challenges and gaps impeding our ability to acquire the needed resources to advance the role of women within the context of the global peace and security architecture.

We acknowledge that the Security Council has provided the leadership necessary to boost the women and peace and security agenda, beginning with resolution 1325 (2000), which set up the framework for subsequent Council resolutions. In Africa, the African Union has been a useful platform for the advancement of the women and peace and security agenda by emphasizing the engagement of women and youth in the continent's development. That has been clearly reflected in the Agenda 2063 of the African Union.

At the subregional level, in September 2010 the Economic Community of West African States, in collaboration with the United Nations Office for West Africa, developed an integrated plan of action for the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000). The plan of action emphasizes the importance of the role of women in conflict prevention, resolution mediation and peacebuilding efforts, as well as the rebuilding of post-conflict societies.

Building on the subregional efforts, in August 2013 Nigeria launched a national action plan to fully implement the relevant provisions of resolution 1325 (2000). The plan reflects the Government's commitment to ensuring the security of women and girls during armed conflict and enhancing their active and direct participation in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. We are also collaborating with our neighbours, Chad, Cameroon, the Niger and Benin within the framework of the Multinational Joint Task Force to defeat the Boko Haram insurgency, which is targeting women and girls.

Our experience in the Lake Chad region is evidence that, with determined international collaboration, terrorism can be defeated. In addition, the Government of Nigeria has taken steps to cater to victims of Boko Haram terrorism in its various forms — including rape and other sexual violence against children, the abduction of children and other grave violations — by putting in motion several legal remedies. Some legal and social remedies undertaken by the Government include the diligent prosecution of more than 200 detained Boko Haram terrorists in competent courts of law, as well as reintegration, reorientation and rehabilitation programmes and psychosocial programmes designed to meet the needs of each victim of sexual violence. The sustained efforts of Nigeria and its international partners have culminated in the liberation of territories previously occupied by Boko Haram.

It is to be noted that 80 per cent of the 2 million internally displaced persons in the north-east of Nigeria are women and girls. We have taken concrete steps to meet their humanitarian needs and to ensure that the necessary conditions are established to enable the voluntary return of the displaced persons to their places of origin in safety and dignity. Indeed, as a sequel to the aforementioned efforts, we welcome the release of the abducted Chibok and Dapchi girls. Our efforts will continue until the remaining ones are released.

I wish to conclude by acknowledging the contributions of civil society organizations as partners in the prevention, management and resolution of disputes. The Nigerian Government will continue to engage them as key stakeholders and partners in the women and peace and security agenda. Nigeria remains fully and firmly committed to the promotion and protection of the rights of women and girls in conflict and post-conflict situations. In this regard, we will work assiduously to enhance the participation of women in peace and security initiatives.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Jordan.

Ms. Sukkar (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank you, Sir, for your efforts as President of the Security Council this month, wishing Peru every success. I would also like to thank the Deputy Secretary-General, Ms. Amina Mohammed, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Pramila Patten, and Ms. Razia Sultana for their important briefings.

The unprecedented crises worldwide have contributed to an increase in sexual violence in conflict. Various groups have used it as a tool of war and terror against women, girls, children and men too. It leads to psychological impact that constitutes a threat to the fabric of society and international peace and security. It is a painful phenomenon that plagues victims throughout the world, in conflicts in Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Syria, Mali, Myanmar and elsewhere.

For example, in Iraq, women and girls in areas under the control of Da'esh, particularly Yazidi and other minority women, are subjected to violations of their human rights and of international humanitarian law that go beyond anything imaginable. The recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/250) describes the horrors plaguing Rohingya women and calls on the international community to alleviate the suffering of these victims, provide them with care and ensure their reintegration in their societies. It also emphasizes the importance of accountability and of combating impunity and discrimination in judgments rendered.

It is important for the United Nations to continue to monitor and follow up on all mechanisms designed to protect women and children. Jordan, together with Finland, is a facilitator of the sixth review of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, and we take into account the rights of victims — women, children and men — who have been subjected to grave violations perpetrated by terrorist groups. We ensure that they receive treatment and care and are reintegrated into society.

Despite the fact that Jordan is located in one of the most tumultuous areas in the world, we have remained an oasis of security and stability. However, the conflicts that surround us have helped us to react with all due speed to prevent certain impacts. In Jordan, we are accustomed to seeing a great deal of displacement, including the recent displacement of refugees from Syria, which has required us to respond. We have stepped up our national efforts to address the demographic changes in our country to maintain security and stability for us in our homeland and for others. We have made efforts not to stigmatize refugees by putting them on equal footing with terrorists or criminals.

Refugees are the main victims of terrorism. Refugees flee the ravages of war plaguing their country with their children, as they await the return of peace so that they can return to their homes. They need to be helped to live in greater dignity so that they themselves do not succumb to obscurantist and terrorist ideologies. This requires coordination and a pooling of efforts among donor countries, host countries, the United Nations and the international community, with a view to addressing these urgent issues. Based on working with groups in various sectors, we have launched a national plan to activate Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) which is geared towards respecting human rights and promoting the principles of justice, equality and sharing.

The instability plaguing the Arab region is among the great challenges that imperil the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Jordan attaches great importance to the implementation of the Agenda. We seek to establish social peace and security and deliver on sustainable development.

Syrian women refugees represent 45.3 per cent of the total refugees in my country, the overall number of which is 1.3 million people. The female refugees in this group need specific protection, and Jordan is addressing this need by providing a large number of services in the area of health and security.

Jordanian women are active in United Nations peacekeeping operations, in military and police units in Darfur, South Sudan and Abyei. We fully support the Secretary-General's efforts to implement the zero-tolerance policy with regard to sexual exploitation and abuse.

Lastly, we all need to bear responsibility and facilitate the protection of women by including them in international peace and security efforts and implementing political, economic and social policies to tackle the persistent and renewed threats.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Portugal.

Mr. Duarte Lopes (Portugal): I would like to thank the Peruvian presidency of the Security Council for convening today's open debate on this very important issue. Portugal values the fact that the Council continues to give its attention to the women and peace and security agenda, which is an essential tool for preventing conflict and for ensuring more effective responses to today's complex crises.

As the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/250) notes, conflict-related sexual violence is accompanied by the violation of other human rights. Women's security is clearly linked to the fulfilment of human rights, be they political, civil, economic, social or cultural rights. Furthermore, the report also clearly indicates that sexual violence can cause long-term physical and psychological trauma and shred the social fabric. It is therefore essential to ensure that all necessary measures are taken, to strengthen justice mechanisms, to hold accountable those responsible for sexual violence, and to end impunity. It is also of the utmost importance to address the persistent barriers that prevent reporting wartime sexual violence. We need more effective and rigorous investigations for bringing to justice the perpetrators of all these crimes.

Portugal has been implementing resolution 1325 (2000) since the development of our first national action plan in 2009. Currently, our second national action plan includes training programmes on gender equality and violence against women and young women, including sexual violence, gender-based violence and trafficking in human beings, in the fields of justice, armed forces and security forces; the inclusion of issues related to the women and peace and security agenda in our development cooperation, notably aiming at the implementation of resolution 2106 (2013); ensuring that measures are taken so that all victims of violence, including sexual violence, have the right to protection and reparation, and that perpetrators are held accountable; and promoting awareness-raising programmes on health and human rights issues, including on sexual violence and gender-based violence.

Preventing sexual violence in conflict is possible only if all stakeholders are involved in finding durable solutions. In that regard, it is essential to work closely with civil society. Civil society organizations often play an instrumental role in ensuring the full implementation of the women and peace and security agenda, including by complementing the work done by military, security and civilian personnel in conflict and post-conflict settings and in emergency situations. They are often essential to preventing and reporting crimes and to alerting the international community to such crimes, to restoring the internal stability of their countries and to supporting reconstruction efforts and helping the population recover.

Finally, allow me to draw the Council's attention to the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security, which supports the implementation of resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1820 (2008). It is a relevant initiative of which Portugal is a proud member.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Fatima Kyari Mohammed, Permanent Observer of the African Union to the United Nations.

Ms. Mohammed: First allow me to congratulate you, Mr. President, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for this month and to commend you for convening this important open debate. I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his report on conflict-related sexual violence (S/2018/250). I would like to further commend Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed and Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict Pramila Patten for their insightful briefings. I wish to further thank Ms. Razia Sultana, of the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security, for sharing her experience and some strategic approaches to preventing sexual violence from being used as a destructive weapon of war, particularly against women and girls.

The African Union (AU) member States have undertaken with determination, together with the AU Commission, to make the women and peace and security agenda a concrete instrument of the AU Peace and Security Council and of the international agenda. The African Union Commission is fully committed to ensuring that women's empowerment, gender equality and access to justice are strong components of its peace and security architecture and are fully implemented at local, national and continental levels.

Today's open debate is all the more relevant as it places a sharp focus on concrete strategies and practical implementation of the women and peace and security agenda. Over the years, the African Union has developed strategies to answer the call by operationalizing, monitoring and evaluating reporting systems to better ensure the protection of civilians.

The AU stands firmly with regard to its position of zero tolerance for sexual violence. In that context, I would like to put forward three specific strategies the African Union has developed to accelerate the implementation the resolution 1325 (2000) agenda and to address sexual and gender-based violence.

First, within the African context, protocols, declarations, laws, policies and strategies for addressing sexual and gender-based violence, and, more specifically, conflict-related sexual violence, are in place. For instance, as of December 2017, 22 African countries had adopted national action plans on resolution 1325 (2000) and related resolutions, including those that specifically address conflict-related sexual violence.

Secondly, while we recognize the weak implementation of those normative frameworks, the African Union's Office of the Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security has undertaken initiatives towards bridging the gap between policy and implementation. Specifically, the Office of the Special Envoy has embarked on the development of a continental results framework for monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the women and peace and security agenda in Africa. The framework was validated in March 2018 by African Union member States and national action plans were adopted. The framework provides a unique opportunity to address conflict-related sexual violence by ensuring that AU member States are held accountable for their commitments to preventing sexual and gender-based violence in conflict, as well as to enhancing women's participation in peace processes and ensuring that women's needs are met in post-conflict reconstruction processes, in line with the provisions of resolution 1325 (2000) and related resolutions.

Thirdly, building on earlier actions to move forward the implementation of commitments on the women and peace and security agenda, the AU Commission continues its efforts to enhance the agency of women in peace processes through support to women's networks that strengthen the role and leadership of women in key paths to peace, security and development. Those include two major initiatives that I would like to mention. The first is the creation of the Network of African Women Mediators, FemWise, facilitated by the Panel of the Wise and the Office of the Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security, and the African Women Leaders Network. That was initiated in partnership with the United Nations through the Offices of the AU Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security and UN-Women with the support of the Federal Republic of Germany. The African Women Leaders Network has recorded important milestones for women on the ground, including the joint AU-United Nations high-level solidarity mission to Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which took place in July 2017 and was led by the Deputy Secretary-General to revitalize women's participation in peace, security and development in Africa. Women leaders, from top leadership to those affiliated with grassroots organizations, monitored and reported to the Security Council and the General Assembly sexual and gender-based violence committed against women and girls in fragile and conflict zones. National chapters of the Network have been launched in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in Côte d'Ivoire, demonstrating the action-oriented and national ownership of perspectives of that inclusive platform. It is a Network of and for women and for action.

We wish to commend the Permanent Missions of Germany and Ghana for taking the leadership of the Group of Friends of the African Women's Leaders Network to the United Nations as a concrete way to support and promote that initiative with a guiding vision to support women's participation in peace, security and political processes on the continent through the work of the United Nations. We thank the 51 cross-regional and dynamic Member States that have joined the Group and invite others to join it in order to bolster this agenda on the international scene.

Let me conclude by saying that the United Nations agenda on women and peace and security remains a key priority for the African Union Commission and its Chairperson. The Council can fully count on the AU's support to ensure its concrete implementation, in line with the Joint United Nations-AU Framework for Enhanced Partnership in Peace and Security, signed, respectively, by the two institutions in April 2017 and January 2018.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Germany.

Mr. Heusgen (Germany): I thank you, Mr. President, for putting this item on the agenda. I would also like to thank you, Sir, for your statement and to highlight the good cooperation we have had with the African Union on the topics that I will mention later.

Conflict-related sexual violence is, as I think the Swedish Minister said earlier today, a security challenge. It is also a horrible, despicable example of a violation of basic human rights. Therefore, I am very grateful again that you, Mr. President, to have put it on the agenda.

I would like to commend Special Representative of the Secretary-General Pramila Patten for her tireless work. I am very happy, having listened to all the remarks around the table for at least part of the discussion, that the Secretary-General's report (S/2018/250) and her presentation today, with just a few exceptions, have been commended by everybody. Germany supports her work and will continue to do so.

I would like to highlight the depressing findings about sexual violence as "a tactic of war" and about the change of demographics and so forth that were referred to in the report of the Secretary-General and in the remarks she made earlier today. Using sexual violence as an instrument to force people into submission is as grave as using gas for the same purpose. Let me focus on four points.

First, we must support the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict and her team of experts in carrying out her mandate. Germany is committed to providing support. We have worked very closely, in particular on the issue of Iraq. I also appreciate the fact that the Iraqi Ambassador highlighted the good cooperation between Office of the Special Representative and Iraq. One of the most outrageous examples of sexual violence in recent decades, which has been discussed today, is the widespread use of sexual violence as a strategy to terrorize the Rohingya community. We urge the authorities of Myanmar to work very closely with the Special Representative to enter into structured dialogue with the United Nations to assist survivors and ensure accountability. When the Security Council travels to Myanmar, I urge it to put this item on the agenda and take up the proposal put forward by Ms. Sultana for the Council to meet with survivors of sexual violence. I believe that the Council would send a clear and important message if it met with people who suffered such crimes.

I would like to highlight other activities of the Special Representative, such as work being conducted in the Sudan. There is a culture of silence surrounding sexual violence in Darfur, which is of deep concern. We encourage the Sudanese Government to work closely with the Council to grant access to the survivors.

Secondly, I would like to address the issue of accountability. As the observer of the African Union just stated, sexual violence, zero-tolerance. It is very important to ensure accountability for all grave violations of human rights — that is key. We owe it to the victims. It is also very important to foster reconciliation and deterrence. I would like to reiterate what was highlighted earlier with regard to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where action was taken. Those who committed such crimes must be punished. If they have not yet been punished, for the rest of their lives they must look over their shoulder and fear being caught until they are apprehended. That covers current and past crimes. A representative today also mentioned the sexual violence that occurred in Europe during the wars in the former Yugoslavia. There was no accountability in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia or, in particular, Kosovo, for the tens of thousands of victims.

The Security Council should include sexual violence as a designation criterion for sanctions regimes much more regularly. The Council should also refer cases of sexual violence to the International Criminal Court. In instances where prosecution is not yet possible, the collection and preservation of evidence of mass atrocities must be ensured. Germany supports the crucial work of the Commission for International Justice and Accountability in northern Iraq and Syria. Germany also supports the new International, Independent and Impartial Mechanism, which, inter alia, should focus on crimes of sexual violence.

Thirdly, we must adopt a survivor-centred approach. My French colleague referred to it as holistic support for survivors. It is important to provide them with medical and psychological care. Economic opportunities and legal protection should also be offered to them. Germany has received a large number of women and children who have suffered traumatic experiences in conflicts in Iraq and Syria. We fund projects in Iraq to enable comprehensive assistance to be provided. I have already mentioned our good cooperation with the Special Representative and the Iraqi Government.

The survivor-centred approach links accountability with psychosocial and livelihood support. Many have mentioned that stigmatization must be fought. It is very important that we educate girls and enhance gender-balance efforts. With regard to stigma, I would like to highlight what our colleagues from Equatorial Guinea and Poland stated earlier today. They said that we must focus on the children conceived through rape, who continue to need our support because of stigmatization.

Fourthly, with regard to the sharing of experiences and best practices, the issue of empowering survivors was on the agenda of the annual meeting of the Women, Peace and Security Focal Points Network, which Germany, together with Spain and Namibia, hosted last week in Berlin. Special Representative Patten and others present today attended that meeting. It served as a platform for sharing experiences and best practices. My Spanish colleague already mentioned it and highlighted the fact that methods of improving accountability for crimes of sexual violence was one of the subjects discussed. Namibia, Spain and Germany will provide a briefing of the Focal Points Network meeting at the end of the month here in New York. We will extend invitations to those who are not yet members of the Network to join us. We also support the sharing of regional experiences through the African Women Leaders Network. The observer of the African Union already highlighted the important cooperation already taking place in Africa, which is compelling and encouraging. My colleague from Kazakhstan mentioned that earlier today.

Once again, I thank you, Sir, for including today's subject on the agenda. Germany will remain committed to it. We are also committed to eliminating and preventing conflict-related violence. The issue of women and peace and security will remain a top priority for us.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Qatar.

Ms. Al-Thani (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): I am pleased to express my appreciation to you, Sir, for convening today's important debate. We thank Ms., Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General, for her important statement this morning, as well as Ms. Pramila Patten, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual violence in Conflict, and Ms. Razia Sultana, representative of the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security, for their briefings today.

Today's meeting is an important opportunity to renew our commitment as the international community to addressing crimes of sexual violence and supporting States that face challenges in conflict and post-conflict settings, as well as to follow up on the measures taken by the Security Council since the adoption of resolution 1325 (2000), on women and peace and security, in order to end such heinous crimes.

We cannot deal with the issue of women and peace and security without addressing the suffering inflicted on women and their vulnerability in conflict situations, or without meaningful, coordinated efforts to protect women and girls. To achieve that, national and international legislation must be implemented, without discrimination, to ensure the judicial prosecution of criminals who commit crimes related to sexual violence.

The State of Qatar has spared no effort in tackling the tremendous challenge of providing the necessary support for promoting and protecting women's rights, empowering women economically, socially and politically and working towards the achievement of gender equality. That would contribute to the fight against sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations, in line with resolution 2106 (2013).

We are aware of the existing link between trafficking, sexual violence, terrorism and the transnational organized crime, as stated in Security Council resolution. Consequently, the State of Qatar has taken all the necessary legislative and executive actions to deal with this issue, and we have intensified cooperation and coordination internationally to that end.

Based on our position on the need to address the root causes of conflict that trigger sexual violence as a result of poverty and unemployment leading to violent extremism, terrorism and conflict, the State of Qatar pays great attention to supporting States and regions that suffer from poverty and face conflicts. That is done through our foreign development and humanitarian aid programme, which contributes nearly $2 billion annually to address such issues. Furthermore, in September 2017, we concluded a memorandum of understanding with the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism and the Silatech Institution in the State of Qatar with a view to boosting youth capacity in Arab and Islamic countries, providing rehabilitation and launching projects to protect youth from violent extremism.

Sexual violence is used as a tool of war and terror in various regions. We are deeply alarmed by those practices being used against women in Syria, where they suffer as a result of forced marriage, sexual slavery, rape and torture. The State of Qatar expresses its deep concern over those inhumane practices against the brotherly Syrian people, in the absence of accountability pertaining to grave violations to international humanitarian law and international human rights law in Syria

Given the gravity of these crimes, which are tantamount to war crimes and crimes against humanity, the State of Qatar renews its commitment to support the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011, established by the General Assembly. It includes specialized experts in the field of sexual violence.

In conclusion, I would like to express my appreciation to the Secretary-General for his efforts in fighting sexual exploitation and abuse in the United Nations system. That has led to the voluntary agreement to end sexual exploitation and abuse. The State of Qatar signed the agreement as an important step towards achieving the desired goal of ending sexual exploitation and abuse in the United Nations system. I renew the call of State of Qatar for strengthening the rule of law.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Ukraine.

Mr. Fesko (Ukraine): Ukraine appreciates the initiative of Peru to hold this open debate, as well as your personal presence, Mr. President, at this time. We thank Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed and Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict Pramila Patten, and in particular Ms. Razia Sultana, for their useful briefings.

Ukraine aligns itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union.

After almost two decades since the adoption of resolution 1325 (2000), the women and peace and security agenda remains as relevant as ever in the face of increasing violence, extremism and deadly conflicts. The alarming figures in the Secretary-General's report (S/2018/250) before us today — noting an increase in severity and scale of conflict-related sexual violence in numerous conflict situations around the globe — are nothing if not testimony to that.

We note with deep concern that sexual violence has become a routine tactical element of war in many conflicts. Rape, sexual slavery, forced marriage and sexual torture constitute abhorrent violations of human rights and human dignity. In some instances, they surpass the level of war crimes and reach the scale of crimes against humanity or a genocidal slaughter. Victims of those crimes do not just deserve justice, they are entitled to it. It is a solemn duty of the Security Council as well as the rest of the international community to do everything in their power to deliver it.

In that context, Ukraine believes that the Security Council should continue to pay priority attention to the due implementation of existing women and peace and security resolutions, in particular to overcome the gaps identified in the 2015 global study on the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000). As a non-permanent Security Council member in 2016-2017, Ukraine did its best to contribute to that goal. We proceed from the conviction that any form of violence against women and girls is a major impediment to security, the restoration of peace, the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

Concerted international efforts aimed at elaborating effective steps to address the issue of sexual violence will reduce the growing magnitude of violence against all women and girls, including sexual and gender-based violence, domestic violence and harmful practices. In that respect, we welcome the fact that the recent sixty-second session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women addressed the importance of rural women and girls victims of gender-based violence having access to justice and quality services.

Ukraine considers the equal and full participation of women in all activities in the areas of prevention and resolution of conflicts, peacebuilding and peacekeeping of the utmost importance. In my country, the ongoing fulfilment of the 2016-2020 national action plan for the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) is aimed at achieving greater participation by women in decision-making, in particular in matters of national security, defence and peacemaking, as well as ensuring the protection for women and girls, including preventing and responding to gender-based violence.

The Government of Ukraine pays particular attention to the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000). For that reason, due to the excellent cooperation with the UN-Women office in Ukraine, the effectiveness of the national action plan's implementation was assessed by international experts. Their contribution will be helpful in updating the national action plan in line with the evolving situation, as well as in taking into account the follow-up resolutions to resolution 1325 (2000). We will finalize that process by June. A State programme on equal rights and opportunities, which was adopted by the Ukrainian Government just last week, will further strengthen the State's response to gender inequalities, with a specific focus on women and girls experiencing multiple forms of discrimination.

The recently adopted State programme for the restoration and development of peace in the eastern regions of Ukraine until 2021 is another important element in overcoming the devastating humanitarian consequences of the Russian invasion carried out by the Moscow regime as part of its overall aggression against the democratic world. It is well known that the conflict has hit hardest the most vulnerable segments of the population, particularly women in the currently occupied regions. It has resulted in widespread human rights violations, including sexual and gender-based violence in the war-affected areas of the country, as outlined in the relevant reports by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Those include a thematic report on conflict-related sexual violence in Ukraine that puts forward a number of recommendations to the Russian Federation and Ukraine.

Unfortunately, as of today, Russia continues to ignore that document, while the Ukrainian Government remains committed to addressing that challenge. For example, on our official request, the UN-Women office in Ukraine, together with the United Nations human rights monitoring mission in Ukraine, developed a strategy for preventing and responding to the conflict-related sexual violence in Ukraine. We intend to integrate that strategy, or at least some of its elements, into the 1325 national action plan. We would like to reiterate our request to the Secretariat to include a reference to the situation of Ukrainian women and girls affected by the Russian invasion in Donbas into all the relevant thematic reports of the Secretary-General.

Finally, let me underline that Ukraine will remain actively engaged in international efforts aimed at promoting women's rights, their participation in peace negotiations and post-conflict reconstruction and at protecting women from sexual and gender-based violence.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of the United Arab Emirates.

Mrs. Nusseibeh (United Arab Emirates): I thank you, Sir, for convening this open debate on sexual violence in conflict. We join others in thanking Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed for her briefing. We also thank Ms. Pramila Patten, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, and offer our continued support to her Office and the Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict for their important work in combating those heinous crimes.

As a member of the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security, the United Arab Emirates endorses the Group's joint statement, delivered earlier by the representative of Canada.

Ten years have passed since the Security Council adopted resolution 1820 (2008), thereby recognizing for the first time that sexual violence is used as a tactic of war and is therefore a matter of international peace and security. Since then, subsequent resolutions have sought to strengthen the United Nations response aimed at ending those crimes and ensuring accountability for their perpetrators, but owing to a lack of implementation, they have sadly fallen short. It is also impossible to overstate the importance of gender equality and women's empowerment in efforts to prevent and respond to such crimes. In fact, as many here have said today, gender equality and women's empowerment, which are fundamental principles of United Arab Emirates foreign policy, are core values that can prevent violence against women when they are woven throughout a society. That is one of the many reasons why the United Arab Emirates stands with the report (S/2018/250) of the Secretary-General on sexual violence in conflict, which rightly affirms that women's physical security is inextricably linked to their political, social and economic status and rights.

Our region is one in turmoil, under siege by terrorist groups such as Da'esh that use sexual violence to terrorize and displace populations. To be under Da'esh's control is to live with the constant fear of rape as a weapon of punishment for resisting its sick world view. The gains made in the struggle against Da'esh in 2017 were significant, but we must be vigilant with regard to the continued risk of the trafficking of women and children who remain under their control. The Secretary-General's report makes it clear that most incidents of mass rape continue to be met with mass impunity. For example, not a single member of Da'esh has been prosecuted for sexual violence offences to date. That sends a dangerous message to groups that use sexual violence as a tactic of terror with the aim of destroying lives and communities. This is why the situation of the Rohingya is so alarming. The mass exodus of the Rohingya community from Myanmar has created a humanitarian crisis that has rightly captured the world's attention. The international community must ensure accountability for these victims — mainly women and girls, but also men and boys — who have been unacceptably targeted for their religion or ethnicity.

Gender equality and women's empowerment are key tenets of the world view of the United Arab Emirates. That is why women's protection and empowerment form one of the three pillars on which our entire foreign assistance strategy rests. It is by mainstreaming those ideals in our global engagement that we can prevent sexual violence in conflict by creating stable, tolerant and prosperous societies. We must intensify our efforts to combat impunity for these crimes and to utilize the tools of the United Nations and the Security Council more effectively to ensure accountability. With the support of the United Arab Emirates, the Team of Experts has carried out its vital Security Council mandate to strengthen Member States' capacity to address sexual violence in conflict in some of the world's most challenging contexts. The United Arab Emirates encourages other Member States to support that work.

The United Arab Emirates believes that smart foreign policy is inclusive foreign policy, one that puts the rights of women front and centre and at the heart of our collective response. The United Arab Emirates will continue to do all that it can to address those crimes and promote gender equality and women's empowerment as critical elements of the peace and security agenda.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Myanmar.

Mr. Suan (Myanmar): Myanmar is striving to build a peaceful, prosperous and democratic nation after decades of military rule, isolation and internal armed conflict. In our efforts to achieve a people-oriented, democratic society, we are working hard to put gender equality and women's empowerment at the heart of our national development strategies. Our 10-year national strategic plan for the advancement of women covers key areas of the United Nations agenda, including women's empowerment and the prevention of violence against women and girls. In 2014 Myanmar also signed the Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict and became the one hundred and fiftieth State to endorse it. We are currently drafting a law on the protection of women and the prevention of violence against them that will cover all forms of violence against women and girls. We have also set up one-stop women's support centres throughout the country to support women and girls who have experienced violence. The centres provide physical, legal, psychological and social support. Starting in 2016, we established national gender-based hotlines to help victims of violence to report such incidents and get counselling. We are also revising our child laws to include a provision on conflict-related sexual violence against children.

Myanmar took a further step towards demonstrating its firm position on preventing and addressing conflict-related sexual violence by inviting Special Representative of the Secretary-General Patten to Myanmar in December 2017. With regard to the joint communiqué proposed by the Special Representative, I would like to say that the Government has already implemented various measures, such as steps to raise awareness on preventing sexual violence. Reports on actions taken by the Government to ensure that the rights of women are protected and sexual violence against women and girls is prevented have also been regularly submitted to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and included in the Universal Periodic Review process of the Human Rights Council. We have also updated this information for the various United Nations special mandate holders. We intend to work with Myanmar-based United Nations agencies on implementing the five priority areas of cooperation identified by the Special Representative.

This year's annual report (S/2018/250) of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence acknowledges the important steps that Myanmar has taken to protect the rights of women and children. However, it is most regrettable that the Tatmadaw, the Myanmar Armed Forces, has been listed in the report, despite Myanmar's genuine efforts to engage constructively with the Office of the Special Representative. Moreover, the decision to list it was made based on unverified allegations, despite our attempts to interview the alleged victims in camps in Cox's Bazar to investigate the cases. We are disappointed that our request for a proper investigation to be carried out was denied.

With regard to the alleged sexual violence mentioned in the Secretary-General's report, the Government of Myanmar has once again made its position very clear that it will not condone any human rights abuse. If there is concrete evidence, we will be ready to take action against any perpetrator in accordance with the law and without impunity. The recent sentencing of seven military personnel who were involved in the Inn Din incident to 10 years in prison with hard labour is clear testimony to the Government's strong commitment to the rule of law. My delegation categorically rejects the groundless accusations that sexual violence was used as a strategy to force Muslim people to flee their homes. In Myanmar, sexual violence is a crime that is abhorrent to our traditional values and strictly forbidden by our law and culture.

My delegation stresses that members of our armed forces are subject not only to our 1959 military act and military by-laws, but also to existing civilian laws and traditions. As such, severe legal action is taken against perpetrators whether they are civilians or members of the security forces, as has been demonstrated by a number of prosecutions of military personnel for sexual violence. Members of the armed forces have been clearly instructed to strictly follow the military code of conduct and to refrain from committing crimes, including any involving sexual violence. A series of capacity-building workshops have been held to educate military personnel on human rights, and the curriculum of our military training schools includes instruction on laws related to the prevention of sexual violence.

Myanmar strongly objects to the use of expressions such as "ethnic cleansing" and "genocide" in reference to the situation in Rakhine state. Such irresponsible accusations, based on unsubstantiated and one-sided allegations, fake news and reports tailored for political purposes, will only exacerbate the current situation and further polarize the various communities in the region. We are seriously concerned that such incessant rhetoric directed against Myanmar can have only a negative impact on the existing cooperation between Myanmar and the United Nations, as well as on our ongoing bilateral cooperation with Bangladesh in our efforts to find a lasting solution to the current humanitarian problems and to the complex situation in Rakhine.

As much as we all condemn conflict-related sexual violence, we should also deplore the exploitation of this sensitive issue by certain groups as a tool to achieve their own political goals. The problem of sexual violence cannot be resolved by naming and blaming. The international community must take a constructive approach by sharing information on violations and assisting Member States in their efforts to address the issue.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Slovenia.

Ms. Bavdaž Kuret (Slovenia): I would like to thank Peru for organizing this important debate, and the speakers for their briefings.

Slovenia aligns itself with the statements delivered by the observer of the European Union and by the representative of Mali, the latter on behalf of the Human Security Network. I would like to make some additional remarks in my national capacity.

Slovenia welcomes the report on conflict-related sexual violence submitted by the Secretary-General (S/2018/250) and shares deep concern with regard to its findings. We join others in condemning the grave violations committed against women and girls, men and boys in conflict situations. As the report once again demonstrates, sexual violence in contemporary conflicts is not a side effect but rather a front-line consideration and a horrifying tactic of war. All perpetrators should be held accountable. It is of the utmost importance to prevent the trend of continuous sexual violence by fighting impunity. In that regard, the role of international criminal justice has been recognized, in particular that of the International Criminal Court.

At the same time, we recall that the primary responsibility to protect civilians and bring perpetrators to justice rests with States. The international community must therefore assist States in addressing all these issues, such as when it comes to investigating and prosecuting perpetrators, including United Nations and other peacekeeping personnel.

Although the victims of sexual violence are predominantly women and girls, we should not forget that sexual violence is also committed against boys and men, particularly in detention. Much has already been done when it comes to assistance for victims, but as long as we are faced with tragic stories we must not stop doing everything humanly possible to alleviate their suffering.

Conflict-related sexual violence is not only a humanitarian or human rights issue, but a security issue as well. It impedes women in particular from participating in peace and political processes and in post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation.

Preventing and responding to conflict-related sexual violence are important elements in efforts to empower women and achieve gender equality. Sexual and gender-based violence presents a barrier to women's participation, not only in peace-related and post-conflict activities but also in everyday life.

Slovenia is addressing the correlation between conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence in two draft strategic documents to be adopted this year. The new action plan on the implementation of Security Council resolutions on women and peace and security for the period 2018-2020 addresses conflict-related sexual violence with activities devoted to accountability, education and training. Violence against women, including sexual violence, alongside areas dedicated to empowering women, will also form part of guidelines on gender equality in development cooperation.

At the national level, important achievements have also been reached in education and training on women and peace and security, which were systematically introduced throughout the Slovenian armed forces. In 2015, a permanent position for a gender adviser in the General Staff of the Slovenian armed forces was established, as was a network of gender advisers. We are proud that those efforts have shown concrete results and have also been recognized internationally, with Slovenia ranking fourth in the world on the Women, Peace and Security Index.

However, there is no time to rest. We will continue to support United Nations action against conflict-related sexual violence. Accordingly, we have joined the Secretary-General's voluntary compact on preventing and addressing sexual exploitation and abuse as part of the overall zero-tolerance policy, which Slovenia strongly supports.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Ms. Furman (Israel): As a member of the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security, Israel aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Canada on behalf of the Group and would like to add the following remarks.

First, I would like to thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Patten and her team for their dedicated work and for the Secretary-General's recent report (S/2018/250), which focuses on current trends and provides us with concrete recommendations. The report highlights that the past year was marked by the liberation of territories and the release or escape of numerous women and girls formerly held by armed or terrorist groups. It is our collective duty to support those women and girls as they try to piece their lives back together.

Despite the encouraging news on women and girls who have been released, it is important to remember that they will carry the burden of their horrific experiences for the rest of their lives. Take, for example, Zahra, a Yazidi woman from Kojo, Iraq, who recalls trembling at the sight of buses of Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS) fighters with long hair and beards who had come to kidnap hundreds of women and girls, blindfold them and sell them as sex slaves. Ekhlas, another Yazidi woman, whom members may have heard speak at the United Nations last year, was raped every day for six months by ISIS terrorists. She was only 14 years old. Ekhlas remembers the screams of a 10-year-old girl who had been taken away by a man four times her age. She is haunted by the memory of her own abuser, a man she rightly described as a beast, who made her want to die. We cannot be silent in the face of such barbaric acts, which should have been relegated to the Dark Ages.

Groups like ISIS, Al-Shabaab, Boko Haram and Al-Qaida use sexual violence as a terror tactic, but it is not just they who are guilty. According to a recent report by Special Representative Patten and other accounts, the Syrian armed forces, the Syrian intelligence services and Syrian pro-Government forces are guilty of employing those savage practices as well. We must make sure that those who commit these horrific crimes are brought to justice. Impunity for such crimes must not be tolerated. Our approach must include a variety of measures, including the adoption of stronger laws, more stringent enforcement mechanisms, tougher penalties for offenders and the provision of safe havens for victims to seek help, support, medical treatment, psychological care and legal assistance.

In some instances over recent years, victims of sexual violence were violated not only by extremist armed groups and repressive regimes, but also by United Nations peacekeepers. Among those sent to protect local populations from harm, there have been individuals who have abused their positions and violated the most basic human rights. Such acts of sexual exploitation and abuse must not be tolerated. We firmly support the Secretary-General's zero-tolerance policy, as well as his compact with Member States committing to the elimination of sexual exploitation and abuse, which Israel was among the first to sign. In that context, we should incorporate more women in peacekeeping operations. We also wish to reiterate our support for the victim-centred approach, promoted through the work of the Victims' Rights Advocate and the Special Coordinator on improving the United Nations response to sexual exploitation and abuse.

As stated earlier, victims of sexual violence and abuse must be afforded the tools to safely report these violations, regardless of the identities of the perpetrators. In that regard, we were glad to hear of the recent initiative to start a system of community-based reporting to encourage victims to come forward, especially if they are assaulted by United Nations peacekeepers or personnel.

Facing the risk of rejection by their families and communities, it is no surprise that the majority of cases of sexual violence go unreported and that victims face an increased risk of suicide. That is a reality we cannot tolerate. Sexual violence must be treated as the crime and as the act of terror that it is. It is the collective responsibility of the entire international community — of our Governments, civil societies and United Nations agencies — to remove the stigma, erase the shame and come to the aid of victims of sexual violence. Victims of sexual violence are more than statistics. Every victim has a name, every name reflects a life and every life represents an entire world.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Archbishop Bernardito Cleopas Auza, Permanent Observer of the Observer State of the Holy See to the United Nations.

Archbishop Auza: The Holy See would like to thank the Peruvian presidency for putting a needed spotlight on conflict-related sexual violence and on how it can be prevented and effectively addressed.

Since the Council adopted resolution 1325 (2000), the international community has developed a strong framework to facilitate women's increased role in peace and security and has achieved important results and made substantial progress, in spite of the increasing challenges and complexities of the international security landscape. On the side of the victims of conflict, however, women still suffer far too frequently, in particular from sexual violence perpetrated during conflict. Collective national and international efforts are greatly needed if the fight to minimize and end violence against women — in particular sexual violence — is to be won.

First, ever-greater resources and focus must be dedicated to conflict prevention. The Holy See supports the efforts of the Security Council, within the limits of its mandate under the Charter of the United Nations, to actively encourage Member States to settle their disputes through dialogue and negotiation. There is no better means to protect women from violence during conflict than by preventing the eruption of conflict itself. Attention must be given to ensuring that women's voices are heard and their effective participation is availed of throughout the whole process.

Secondly, the prevention of every form of violence against women in conflict and the protection of their legitimate rights and interests should be an integral part of peacekeeping operations. The importance of integrating women in peacekeeping missions can also be seen from that perspective. Host countries should be helped to prioritize the prevention of violence against women during conflict, while ensuring the inclusion and active participation of women in all stages of peace processes.

Thirdly, heightened attention and efforts to prevent violence against women should be sustained in post-conflict situations, which, more often than not, remain chaotic, lawless and dangerous, and are therefore environments that enable and facilitate violence against women and failure of prosecution. With the goal of eliminating the root causes of conflict, the international community should actively help post-conflict countries rebuild and ensure that the dividends of peace and development benefit the entire population.

With regard to access to education, the Catholic Church has a long and proud history of placing great emphasis on providing young women and girls with access to quality education. Young women and girls today constitute the majority of students in Catholic educational institutions at every level throughout the world. That is particularly true in regions where women and girls still suffer discrimination and in areas where there are ongoing conflicts. For instance, almost 80 per cent of the students of Bethlehem University, a Catholic institution, are young Palestinian women. They become educators and professionals who contribute greatly to peace and harmony in families and societies.

Survivors of violence in conflict should receive comprehensive assistance to ensure that they are able to recover fully from such violations and reintegrate into their societies. States should maximize their efforts, at both the national and international levels, to ensure the prosecution of the perpetrators of these crimes. The International Criminal Court plays a key role in that regard by judging crimes that have been recognized by the Rome Statute as war crimes and crimes against humanity, including those that may constitute crimes of genocide.

Women and girls suffer many forms of violence not only in situations of conflict but also in what we call normal daily situations. However, as Pope Francis said during his visit to Puerto Maldonado in Peru:

> "Violence against women cannot be treated as normal, maintaining a culture of machismo blind to the leading role that women play in our communities. It is not right for us to look the other way and let the dignity of so many women, especially young women, be trampled upon."

The Holy See is working with the rest of the international community to continue pursuing the goals of women and peace and security. Their role must be recognized and valued and their participation assured. Without the input and specific skills of women, the most comprehensive understanding possible of the causes of conflicts and the most effective solutions to end them and build peace cannot be attained, and the effective prevention of conflict-related sexual violence against women could hardly be achieved.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Sudan.

Mr. Elnour (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): The delegation of my country would like to thank the presidency of Peru for dedicating this open debate to this important subject. We would also like to thank Ms. Amina Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General, and Ms. Pramila Patten, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, for their briefings and efforts. We thank as well Ms. Sultana for her briefing this morning.

We align ourselves with the statement delivered by the Permanent Observer of the African Union to the United Nations and would like to deliver this statement in our national capacity.

This important subject requires a comprehensive approach in addressing this heinous crime in order to deal with it in all its aspects, given the deep and significant consequences it has on individuals and societies. It also requires coordinated cooperation among all the relevant stakeholders. Allow me to provide preliminary proposals on how to act and move forward in the future to address this heinous crime.

First, we should step up efforts to resolve conflicts all over the world so as to impede those who commit such crimes. That can be achieved by strengthening the role of the United Nations in mediation, on the one hand, and imposing sanctions by the Security Council on those who obstruct peace, on the other hand.

Second, we should provide assistance to affected countries to help them build their national capacities in relation to fighting conflict-related sexual violence.

Third, we should enhance cooperation and partnerships with the United Nations and regional organizations to address such crimes.

Fourth, we should allocate sufficient resources for the Trust Fund in Support of Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, as recommended by the report (S/2018/250) of the Secretary-General.

Fifth, we should promote efforts to empower women economically, socially and politically. Sixth, we must address the root causes of armed conflict to ensure the sustainability of peace and the non-recurrence of conflicts.

Seventh, we must provide health care and psychological, social, economic and legal support to victims.

Eighth, we must impose stricter sanctions on those committing such heinous crimes.

Finally, we must pay more attention to the issue of conflict-related sexual violence in peacekeeping missions.

At the national level, the Government of the Sudan has put in place a number of plans and policies on fighting violence against women, particularly in conflict-affected areas. They include the national policy on the empowerment of women, adopted in 2007, and the national plan to combat violence against women for the period 2015-2030. The Government also adopted a national plan on women and peace and security in line with Security Council resolution 1325 (2000).

The Government of my country has established many institutional frameworks to protect and advance the status of women. Child protection units have been established in the armed forces, a family and child protection unit has been set up within the police and the number of female police officers has increased, particularly in internally displaced persons' camps in Darfur. Training courses have been designed to train those female officers in investigation, international law and human rights. In addition, a specialized unit has been established by the Ministry of Social Development to fight violence against women and girls.

In cooperation with UNICEF, the Government has made great efforts to support the establishment of family and child protection units in Darfur. The United Nations Population Fund has also provided health services to victims through the Federal Ministry of Health in order to coordinate follow-up on gender-based violence and, through necessary cooperation with relevant bodies, to provide social, psychological and legal assistance to victims.

In order to address the challenges related to achieving justice and ensuring violators of human rights, and women's rights in particular, are held accountable, a number of specialized prosecution offices have been established in Darfur states and new prosecutors have been appointed since 2015. That has improved the monitoring of human rights violations, including sexual crimes. In order to improve and enhance security, additional police units have been deployed in many areas in Darfur states.

We would like to commend the United Nations strategy for the protection of civilians. The African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur and the country team have made progress thanks to the early-warning and early-response strategies. That has been achieved by enhancing interaction with local communities and amending the weekly schedule of patrols to coincide with the movement of women and girls.

The Government of the Sudan wishes to seriously engage in the international community to address the impact of conflict by ensuring security and providing the necessary protection for women, girls and children. It therefore extended a warm invitation to Ms. Pramila Patten, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict, to visit the Sudan from 18 to 25 February. The programme of the visit was coordinated with her Office in New York. During her visit, she met with a number of federal ministers to deepen cooperation and eliminate all causes and factors of sexual violence in areas of conflict. Ms. Patten also visited North and West Darfur states, where she examined the situation in a number of a refugee and internally displaced persons' camps and witnessed how security prevails in Darfur states.

The visit in itself is a proof that the Government of the Sudan is engaged in a constructive manner with the international community and that that has led to what we are witnessing today: the restoration of normalcy in Darfur states after 15 years of an exceptional situation never experienced before in the history of Darfur. We believe that the visit gave Ms. Patten and her delegation an opportunity to witness at first-hand the situation in Darfur and to collect information from reliable and credible sources.

However, we have questions regarding part of the content of the Secretary-General's report before the Council (S/2018/250), namely, paragraph 72. The report states that Sudan border guards committed sexual crimes in Darfur, knowing that in the Sudan the so-called border guards have not existed for more than two years. We also have questions regarding other words and phrases in the same paragraph.

In conclusion, the delegation of my country reaffirms that the Government of the Sudan will continue to commit to fully cooperating with the United Nations and its agencies. We will also cooperate with all regional and international organizations, above all the African Union. We would like to welcome in particular the spirit demonstrated by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, and we confirm once again that the Darfur conflict has ended. Our task now should be to achieve comprehensive economic and social development, and that, no doubt, is the panacea to put all conflicts to an end.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Bangladesh.

Mr. Islam (Bangladesh): We thank the Peruvian presidency of the Security Council for organizing this open debate.

The Secretary-General's report on conflict-related sexual violence makes for difficult reading. The report aptly observes that:

> "[w]hile significant normative progress has been achieved in recent years ... words on paper are not yet matched by facts on the ground." (*S/2018/250, para. 10*)

It is also perhaps telling that the majority of the 47 listed parties from 19 country situations enumerated in the report happen to be non-State actors. The analytical perspectives shared on the underlying causes of sexual violence in times of war and peace and the multidimensional motivations and drivers that the perpetrators take recourse to in unleashing such violence reinforce the complexity and depravity of this scourge. We consider the report's recommendations to be objective, pragmatic and urgent. We urge the Security Council to ensure concrete deliverables on the basis of the recommendations to further validate its recognition of conflict-related sexual violence as a threat to international peace and security.

At the previous open debate on women and peace and security, held in October 2017 (see S/PV.8079), we flagged the need for Rohingya women and girls to have an opportunity to have their voices heard in the Council. We acknowledge the powerful testimony given today by Ms. Razia Sultana, a Rohingya representative, on behalf of the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security. It is a credit to Ms. Pramila Patten, the Secretary General's Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, that she could help amplify the voices of the Rohingya women in the Chamber. We hear and share Ms. Sultana's concerns about the protection needs and challenges faced by the displaced Rohingya women and girls in Bangladesh.

It continues to be a race against time to ensure humanitarian assistance and protection for nearly 700,000 displaced people, the majority being women and children. Humanitarian actors have identified more than 2,000 pregnant women requiring particular attention. In general, considerable unmet needs remain in terms of providing reproductive health care and services to survivors of sexual violence and others. It will be critical for the international community to support the work of the United Nations agencies concerned and their partners by providing services to those in need.

In an otherwise socially conservative milieu, the women- and child-friendly spaces in the camps provide a lifeline for the survivors of sexual violence and related trauma. We encourage community leaders and service providers to help the affected women and girls to come forward to articulate their needs and register their voices in decisions that impact their lives and futures. The concerns over stigma need to be addressed and must be shifted from the victims to the perpetrators in a demonstrable manner.

Our authorities have looked seriously into reports of the trafficking and sexual exploitation of Rohingya women and girls. It would be regrettable if such incidents were to take place despite the overwhelming presence on the ground of law enforcement personnel and humanitarian actors. While recommendations for additional safeguards are being duly considered, there is no guarantee against such aberrations other than restoring hope among the displaced Rohingya by ensuring the safe, secure and dignified return to their homes in Myanmar's Rakhine state. We believe that Security Council members will be in a position to gather further insights into the possibilities for the Rohingya's voluntary repatriation during their forthcoming visit to Myanmar and Bangladesh.

It is crucial that priority be given to preventing conflict-related sexual violence and that we remain committed to responding to such violence. The Special Representative's three-pillar strategy deserves to be further discussed and elaborated on in the context of the mutually reinforcing agenda on women and peace and security, sustaining peace and the Sustainable Development Goals.

There is no denying that a bulwark against the use of sexual violence as a tactic of war and of terrorism can be created only when the structural and gender-based inequalities that are inherent in our mindsets and societies can be effectively addressed. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides many cross-cutting pathways for advancing women's empowerment and gender equality. Yet even that universal and ambitious Agenda will continue to fall short unless the gender-related targets are pursued in parallel with progressive change in prevailing gender norms across societies.

The culture of impunity often surrounding conflict-related sexual violence also perpetuates the vicious cycle. In cases where the State concerned is unwilling or unable to ensure accountability and justice for such crimes, the international community, especially the Security Council, cannot avoid its responsibility. There have been resounding calls for the Council to consider referrals to the International Criminal Court and for appropriate sanctions against the entities listed in the Secretary General's report. In particular, the Secretariat also has a responsibility to ensure that the State actors listed are barred from United Nations peacekeeping operations. The shrinking resources for protection and gender experts in peacekeeping missions must be reversed.

Against the backdrop of the immediate crisis faced by the Rohingya women and girls, our authorities are moving ahead with work on developing a national action plan on women and peace and security through consultations with all the actors concerned. We look forward to continued engagement with the Special Representative's Office and other partners to translate our plans and commitments into results-oriented action.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of South Africa.

Mr. Mgobozi (South Africa): Allow me to congratulate you, Mr. President, and the Peruvian delegation on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of April. Furthermore, we would like to extend our appreciation to you, Sir, for organizing this open debate on the very important topic of sexual violence in conflict. I would also like to thank the Deputy Secretary-General, Ms. Amina Mohammed, Ms. Pramila Patten and Ms. Razia Sultana for their briefings.

South Africa welcomes the Secretary-General's leadership on conflict prevention and sustaining peace. We note that the effective implementation of the women and peace and security agenda directly contributes to those objectives. My delegation also welcomes the Secretary-General's report (S/2018/250) on conflict-related sexual violence and notes its content.

Of all the evils that occur during a conflict, systemic and widespread sexual violence remains one of the most despicable. As an instrument of war, it is a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. We call on all parties to fully support the survivors of all those atrocious acts and strongly condemn the use of sexual violence in all its forms as a tactic of war and terrorism and as an instrument of torture.

Women and girls continue to be disproportionately affected by conflict situations, especially with regard to sexual abuse and violence. The lives of the survivors of sexual violence are changed forever, with many survivors bearing not only the physical scars but also the hidden trauma and unwarranted stigma as a result of those acts. The use of sexual violence as an instrument of war destroys families and communities, with the ultimate goal being to divide, dominate and control society. Ending this evil scourge, addressing the resulting trauma and holding those responsible for committing such heinous acts accountable is integral to the reconciliation and peacebuilding process. Therefore, my delegation calls on all parties in conflict zones to make and implement commitments to combat sexual violence, in accordance with resolution 2106 (2013), on the issueo of sexual violence in conflict.

We must all do more to prevent sexual violence in conflict. In that regard, we encourage the Security Council to give close consideration to addressing the risk factors and early-warning signs of systemic sexual violence. South Africa believes that that can be achieved through the inclusion of a greater number of deployed female peacekeepers, particularly women protection advisers, in peacekeeping missions, and we call on all Member States to support the inclusion of such posts in the mandates and budgets of peacekeeping operations. In that regard, South Africa has one of the largest contingents of women peacekeepers deployed in United Nations peacekeeping missions. The contribution of women to peacekeeping and peacemaking efforts is recognized as a contributing factor to the effectiveness and long-term success of United Nations deployments.

Allowing women to talk to women about their experiences creates a more conducive and safe environment for women to communicate their immediate protection concerns, including the reporting of instances of sexual abuse and their overall perspectives on the security situation. The ability to speak freely contributes to the empowerment of women in conflict situations, which, in turn, provides space for women to contribute to and participate in the peacebuilding and reconciliation process.

Access to justice and legal recourse for cases of sexual violence is another essential component of the peacebuilding and reconciliation process. Without perpetrators having to face the consequences for their actions, there can be no justice for the survivors of sexual violence, and there can be no peace without justice.

Sexual abuse and discrimination are inextricably linked to gender inequality, poverty, exclusion and marginalization. My delegation believes that we need to directly address those contributors to conflict, including the promotion of gender equality and greater participation by women in all forms of mediation, post-conflict recovery and peacebuilding processes, if we are ever to tackle the root causes of conflict. Women's voices must be prominent during peace negotiations and conflict resolution processes to ensure that all those affected by conflict, especially those who are the most marginalized and vulnerable, namely, women and girls, are given an opportunity to play an active role in changing their environments.

In that regard, the necessary legal framework needs to be strengthened to address all forms of discrimination against women, including with respect to land ownership, access to economic opportunities, employment, education and health care, which are all essential components of an inclusive, open and peaceful society.

In conclusion, South Africa continues to prioritize the participation of women in peace and security processes, particularly through training programmes on mediation, dialogue and conflict resolution. We remain committed to addressing the scourge of conflict-related sexual violence in all its forms. We will work vigorously towards a non-discriminatory and non-sexist global society in which all women and girls are treated as equal citizens. The end of discrimination against women will significantly help to address the root causes of sexual violence.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Ireland.

Ms. Byrne Nason (Ireland): I would like to thank the Peruvian presidency for organizing and presiding over this important debate. I also wish to thank Deputy Secretary-General Mohammed, Special Representative Patten and Ms. Sultana for their earlier briefings. It is very encouraging to see a Rohingya woman address the Security Council for the first time. This is an important day for us, and I wish to thank everybody who has made it happen.

It is an understatement to say that Ireland is a strong supporter of the women and peace and security agenda. My country has a deep conviction that women are critical to everything we are trying to achieve in conflict prevention and resolution. Just last week, Ireland celebrated the twentieth anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement, the hallmark of the peace process in Northern Ireland. The participation of women in the search for peace was crucial to its success.

When two women from the island of Ireland, Mairéad Corrigan and Betty Williams, received the Nobel Prize in 1976 for their efforts to bring peace to Northern Ireland, the Nobel Committee stated that they

> "refused to bow to bleak scepticism: they simply acted. They never heeded the difficulty of their task: they merely tackled it because they were so convinced that this precisely was what was needed. There was no talk here of ingenious theories, of shrewd diplomacy or pompous declarations. No, their contribution was a far better one: a courageous, unselfish act that proved an inspiration to thousands, that lit a light in the darkness, and that gave fresh hope to people who believed that all hope was gone."

Those are the kind of efforts we must continue to replicate. Women made a critical difference to peace and conflict resolution in my country, and we believe that women can do the same elsewhere.

While much policy progress has been made in many areas, today we are addressing one area where we remain very challenged — that of addressing conflict-related sexual violence. We are ashamed that women and girls are routinely used as a currency of conflict. The Secretary-General's report (S/2018/250) does not make for easy reading. It is a clarion call to action for Member States to double down on efforts to address sexual violence in conflict.

We in Ireland firmly believe that the role of civil society at the grassroots level is critical for empowering women in conflict prevention, which the Security Council reaffirmed with resolution 2106 (2013). Ireland is particularly concerned to hear reports of the targeting of high-profile female human rights defenders through crimes of sexual violence. Today we urge Member States to take measures to ensure the adequate protection of women in the civil society space. Ireland also urges the Security Council to assume its own responsibility in that regard and to be consistent and timely in its use of sanctions against perpetrators of conflict-related sexual violence.

We all recognize that the majority of victims of conflict-related sexual violence are marginalized women and girls, often living in rural areas that are well beyond the reach of law enforcement and protection.

Rural women are vulnerable to displacement and are often forced to flee following struggles for the control of land and resources. Women's physical security is therefore inextricably linked with their political, social and economic security. Women bear the brunt of conflict at every level.

As Chair of the Commission on the Status of Women, Ireland was pleased to see the real vulnerabilities of rural women highlighted in the Secretary-General's report and in our agreed conclusions, at this year's sixty-second session, on challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls. I urge Member States to consider those powerful agreed conclusions, in conjunction with the Secretary-General's recommendations on conflict-related sexual violence.

At the national level, Ireland has incorporated measures to prevent sexual violence into our second action plan on women and peace and security. The Irish Defence Forces have mainstreamed women and peace and security into their policies, with gender advisers and gender focal points incorporated into all units. We have a zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse, which is very strictly enforced.

Ireland believes that engaging men and boys is critical to preventing sexual violence in conflict. Irish Aid works hard and supports non-governmental partners in delivering such programmes. We are also one of the 14 States that, along with the European Union, are signatories to the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies. We fully support the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. We admire her work and enjoy excellent cooperation with her Office, and we will continue to support her financially.

In conclusion, I wish to return to those two women from Northern Ireland and their Peace Prize day. The Committee also said on that day:

> "It would be simple to maintain that this is all self-evident and that anyone could say this in despair at the meaningless sufferings of war. Yes, but in reality the solution of each and every human conflict is to be found in the simple and obvious action of someone taking the first steps on the road to reconciliation and cooperation."

Those two women from Northern Ireland took those first steps. We can only hope that others follow their example.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Paraguay.

Mr. Arriola Ramírez (Paraguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the delegation of the Republic of Paraguay, I thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2018/250) on conflict-related sexual violence. We welcome the initiative of the Peruvian presidency of the Security Council to convene this debate.

Paraguay has participated in United Nations peacekeeping activities since 1965. Since then, it has gradually introduced women into military contingents and the police force, who contribute to the security and preservation of international peace. In that regard, since 2006, my country has seen female career officers graduate from its Military Academy. Currently, Paraguay contributes more than 100 military and police personnel to six United Nations peacekeeping missions.

Based on that experience, my delegation highlights the value of specialized training for peacekeeping missions contingents, both before and after deployment, on the prevention of conflict-related sexual violence, the care of victims and the resources available for the prosecution and trial of those responsible, while always respecting the sovereignty of States, the principle of non-intervention in internal affairs, and international law. Paraguayan military personnel receive general training on the protection of civilians in armed conflict prior to their deployment in peacekeeping missions, as well as specific and specialized training on civil-military coordination and on violence and gender inequality, at the Training Centre for Peacekeeping Operations in Paraguay.

Based on Paraguayan participation, another area that we believe should be reinforced is the clear inclusion by the Security Council of the protection of civilians in armed conflict in the mandates of peacekeeping operations. The mandate of protection of civilians against sexual violence, in its broadest sense, must be explicit and treated as a priority in situations where, due to the nature of the conflict, civilians are at a high risk of suffering that type of violence. Those mandates must incorporate both prevention mechanisms and protocols to assist victims and ensure accountability of the perpetrators. To that end, the existing mandates of peacekeeping missions should also be updated and adapted.

Finally, and from a broader perspective, the Paraguayan delegation highlights the need to frame initiatives addressing sexual violence in conflict situations within efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly Goal 5, on gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. A holistic, effective and lasting response to the scourge of sexual violence in conflict will not be possible as long as there is an inequality gap between women and men, discrimination and the economic and social exclusion of women and girls in every part of the world.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the observer of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

Ms. Hutchinson: I thank you, Mr. President, for this opportunity to address the Security Council as the NATO Secretary General's Special Representative for Women, Peace and Security.

NATO's mandate is based on the alliance's core values: democracy, individual liberty and rule of law — themes that resonate so clearly with the women and peace and security agenda. The adoption of the women and peace and security resolutions and the work of the Council has established a new course in understanding and responding to the grievous, systematic sexual abuse of women and girls in and around conflict. Awareness that conflict-related sexual violence affects not only women and girls, but also entire communities, is now entrenched in our collective thinking.

The international community has a responsibility to better protect women, but we know that protection cannot exist without the promotion of women's rights and acceptance that women's full participation in all decision-making is critical. The elevation of sexual violence as an international peace-and-security issue has led to an increased expectation that actors, including NATO, take a more prominent role in addressing this issue. Without adequate response, conflict-related sexual violence will continue to significantly jeopardize stabilization efforts, as well as sustainable post-conflict reconstruction.

At NATO, we understand that protection is at the core of the women and peace and security mandate. NATO-led forces have a responsibility to protect and defend women against violence, but we also recognize that that cannot be, nor should be, separated from the issue of empowerment and participation. There can be no protection without participation.

Under the auspices of the NATO policy on women and peace and security and its action plan, we address sexual violence through a comprehensive approach, as part of the wider women and peace and security framework. The development of military guidelines to prevent and respond to conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence has given us a base from which to work and serves as a practical tool.

However, we recognize that efforts must be coordinated with other international organizations and civil society. For that reason, we have established a civil society advisory panel to garner the views of women not only from within our borders, but also, and more important, the views of women from crisis areas, to help steer our work. Women must be visible in voicing mechanisms for protection.

Earlier this year, NATO joined forces with United Nations Special Envoy Angelina Jolie to advance the issue of conflict-related sexual violence by mainstreaming efforts through all our core tasks and functions. We believe that NATO has an opportunity to be a leading protector of women's rights, drawing on the strengths and capabilities of its nations and working with more than 40 partner countries.

At NATO, we tackle protection through a holistic approach to address the wider issues that affect women in conflict and post-conflict situations. We focus on the importance of protecting women and girls from violence, but we place equal emphasis on the necessity of supporting and enhancing women's participation. We recognize that the best defence against sexual violence is prevention. We attempt to make gender equality a central tenant of all our efforts, and we are emphasizing and expanding areas of prevention. The adoption of early-warning indicators, strengthened civil society dialogue and reinforced public diplomacy have reinforced our efforts.

Ultimately, in tackling the issue of abuse and addressing sexual violence against women and girls, we do more than help individual victims; we set a tone for respect of fundamental dignities and human rights. In doing so, we can lay a foundation for lasting stability.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Botswana.

Mr. Ntwaagae (Botswana): We congratulate you, Mr. President, and your country, Peru, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of April. We also thank you, Sir, for convening this thematic debate.

We thank the Deputy Secretary-General, Ms. Amina Mohammed, for her briefing on the Secretary-General's recent report (S/2018/250) on conflict-related sexual violence. We also commend Ms. Pramila Patten, the Secretary-General's Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, for her insightful briefing.

We align ourselves with the statement delivered earlier on behalf of the African Union.

Allow me to begin by reaffirming the importance that Botswana attaches to the protection and promotion of the rights of women and children and its commitment to addressing all forms of violence against women, including support for preventing sexual violence in conflict.

Sexual violence in armed conflict represents one of the most serious forms of violation or abuse of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Ending violations of women's human rights is therefore a moral imperative, and one that we must collectively address. That heinous crime is especially rampant in armed conflict and is used as a tactic of war and terrorism. As a result, its prevention and eradication amounts to upholding universal human rights and maintaining international security. Furthermore, preventing sexual violence is part of conflict prevention and sustaining peace. In that regard, we welcome efforts by the Security Council and the General Assembly to build on the existing zero-tolerance policy and improve the system-wide approach to preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse.

I reaffirm my delegation's continued support for women's empowerment and gender mainstreaming in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As SDG 5 rightly acknowledges, women and girls from anywhere in the world deserve equal rights and opportunities to live free of violence and all forms of discrimination. We also agree that achieving gender equality and women's empowerment is essential to achieving sustained, inclusive and equitable economic growth and sustainable development.

We recognize in today's world the urgent need to undertake concrete measures to combat intolerance, negative stereotyping, stigmatization, discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against persons based on their gender, identity, religion or belief. In this regard, we commend the United Nations system for making an invaluable contribution to and playing an important role in addressing these challenges at the global, regional and national levels and in assisting Member States in their efforts to eliminate and prevent all forms of violence against women and children. To that end, I wish to express the support and appreciation of my delegation for the good work of UN-Women and the effective implementation of the mandates of the Secretary-General's Special Representatives on Sexual Violence in Conflict and Children and Armed Conflict.

While also recognizing the existing normative framework established under resolutions 1261 (1999), 1325 (2000), 2272 (2016) and other subsequent resolutions dealing with women, peace and security and children and armed conflict, Botswana shares the belief that efforts to address sexual violence in conflict should be consistent with and complementary to the United Nations wider efforts. In this regard, we underscore the need for greater coordination and collaboration with all relevant stakeholders to strengthen global efforts in addressing sexual violence. In this connection, we welcome the Secretary-General's launch in 2017 of the Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes. We recognize the key role that religious leaders have in influencing mass followers, and thus their vital role in using their moral authority to support specific strategies to prevent incitement to violence in conflicts.

We remain convinced that more needs be done to address these ongoing atrocities, and my delegation also wishes to emphasize the responsibility of States to comply with their relevant obligations to end impunity and effectively use all available means to enforce accountability by prosecuting all perpetrators of such crimes.

In our quest for the empowerment of women in peace and security, we believe that efforts must be intensified in promoting women's active and equal participation in conflict prevention, conflict resolution, transitional justice and security sector reform processes. In that regard, we strongly support the involvement of women in peace negotiations, peacebuilding and conflict prevention.

Regarding women's access to justice, we call on all States to take practical steps to address obstacles to women's access to justice, including by creating an enabling environment in which women can easily report incidents of violence without fear or intimidation. Furthermore, we urge all States to strengthen the capacity of their national criminal justice systems in order to serve victims fairly and with dignity.

In conclusion, Botswana pledges to work with the international community in developing strategies for preventing violence against women and children in conflict situations. We remain optimistic that, given our collective will and commitment, especially in the Security Council, we can bring an end to these shameful crimes against humanity.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Croatia.

Mr. Drobnjak (Croatia): I would like to start by thanking the Peruvian presidency of the Council for holding this important debate, and all the briefers for their statements.

Croatia aligns itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union and that delivered on behalf of the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security. I shall make some additional remarks in my national capacity.

It is well known that sexual violence has been used for centuries as a tactic of war, but the wars on the territory of the former Yugoslavia — in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo — were among the first to bring reports of mass rape and other sexually violent crimes into the public eye. Developments since that time have clearly shown that sexual violence adds to ethnic and other divisions, entrenches conflict and instability and leaves horrendous physical and psychological scars not only on its victims, but also on entire families and societies. However, sexual violence remains the least condemned crime from the wars of the 1990s, before both the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia and national courts.

In my own country, Croatia, rape was used as a method of intimidation and terror during the aggression to which we were exposed. Some 2,500 people — mostly women but also men — are estimated to have suffered severe forms of sexual violence during the Homeland War. Most of these cases remain unprosecuted and perpetrators continue to go unpunished. As the punishment of perpetrators remains a priority for Croatia, the Law on the Rights of the Victims of Sexual Violence in the Homeland War, adopted in 2015, provides victims with support, recognition and compensation, even if the perpetrators are never found or brought to justice.

However, our experience also teaches us that advanced legal frameworks and international agreements are in themselves not enough if attitudes do not change. Beyond laws, we have to change hearts and minds and challenge cultural and social norms to get to a point where the victim receives the support of the community and the perpetrator is the one who is stigmatized, excluded and penalized by the whole community.

The latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/250) paints a grim picture. Despite specific prohibitions against sexual violence in treaty and customary international law, as well as the political momentum and visibility gained in recent years, sexual violence in armed conflicts and other situations of violence continue to spread around the world. It is thus essential that we address the problem comprehensively. Croatia therefore pays particular attention to ensuring that the guiding norms and principles of the women and peace and security agenda are integrated into our national policies and practices. Our continued engagement in women and peace and security rests on our firm belief that the full realization of women's rights is an indispensable basis for safeguarding basic human rights and achieving lasting peace and security.

Croatia has taken steps to integrate the gender perspective into the national foreign and security policy through its national policy for the promotion of gender equality and its first national action plan for the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000), adopted in 2011. We are currently in the process of developing our second national action plan, which is expected to be adopted in the first half of this year and will cover both our domestic and international activities. Particular attention has been paid to gender-related elements in regular police and military education, as well as in the predeployment training of civilian and military personnel, with a special focus on prevention and response to sexual violence, and a zero tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse. In that context, Croatia strongly supports the Secretary-General's efforts to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations personnel, and has contributed to these efforts by signing the voluntary compact on preventing and addressing sexual exploitation and abuse.

With a special purpose to strengthen the role of women in peace missions and operations, and in line with the pledge given at the Summit on United Nations Peacekeeping in September 2014, for the past three years Croatia has organized predeployment trainings of women police officers from countries that contribute to United Nations peacekeeping missions. So far, a total of 35 women police officers from 19 countries of Africa, Asia and Europe have participated in this training programme, the fourth version of which will be held in May.

Clear guidance on how to operationalize the protection of civilians mandate, including the protection of women and girls from sexual violence, is also needed for peacekeeping missions. We have the opportunity to use United Nations expertise, including such human rights mechanisms as the United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women. We also need to achieve greater progress in ensuring the adequate participation of women in peace talks. Peace accords that fail to include women in post-conflict governance often hinder their access to economic opportunities, justice and reparations.

In conclusion, let me point out that sexual violence in conflict is such a multifaceted issue that can be discussed at much greater length, including relating to forced displacement, forced marriages, sexual slavery and the plight of children born of wartime rape. At the core of our efforts to stop this horrendous crime lies our commitment to conflict prevention and addressing root causes of human rights violations.

Croatia welcomes the emphasis on the urgency of ensuring that sexual violence considerations are explicitly and consistently reflected in prevention efforts and detecting early-warning signs, as well as in peace processes, ceasefires and peace agreements, all security sector reform and other processes in which the United Nations is involved, as well as in sanctions regimes.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Costa Rica.

Mr. Castro Córdoba (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): Costa Rica thanks the Peruvian presidency for convening this open debate on such an important issue. We also thank Ms. Amina Mohammed, Ms. Pramila Patten and Ms. Razia Sultana for their briefings.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement to be made by the representative of Mali on behalf of the Human Security Network.

Sexual violence is unacceptable anytime, anywhere. However, its widespread use as a tactic of terror and a weapon of war and terrorism, where it is inflicted as one of the cruellest and most terrible forms of social coercion, affecting people's dignity and autonomy in the deepest sense, is particularly worrying and reprehensible. Sexual violence perpetuates conflict and undermines security and stability, disrupting people's participation in the political, social and economic life of their societies. The United Nations, as an Organization, and we, as an international community, carry a heavy burden on this issue, having failed to address the causes of violence and sexual abuse through preventive measures and to eliminate impunity in such cases.

The primary responsibility for protecting populations lies with States. It is incumbent upon us to establish robust legal and institutional frameworks with a view to laying a firm foundation for preventing and addressing gaps in the protection of victims, especially women and girls, and to expand the scope of protection measures to the most vulnerable populations, such as ethnic and religious minorities; women in rural areas; women and girls associated with armed groups; the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender population; as well as boys and men, who are equally vulnerable to sexual violence, the prevalence of which is increasing.

Sexual violence as a cause of forced displacement is equally worrying, as is the growing risk of violence in the context of mass movements where migrants, refugees and displaced persons are subjected to sexual extortion, trafficking and smuggling, harassment and rape, among other abuses. It is essential that conflict-related sexual violence be considered as grounds for granting refugee or asylum status, with victim assistance policies.

We urge States to criminalize all acts of sexual violence in the strongest possible terms, including, where appropriate, by referring them to the International Criminal Court, in order to completely eliminate impunity in such cases. These acts of violence are war crimes, and a zero-tolerance policy must be applied to those who commit, order or condone sexual violence in conflict situations.

Fully utilizing existing international legal mechanisms and ensuring accountability are dissuasive means and vital instruments for ensuring justice for victims. It is also important to encourage cooperation and information-sharing, as well as to provide legal assistance to victims and training for security forces and peacekeepers. Similarly, in the context of the United Nations, we welcome such initiatives as the appointment of an ombudsman for victims' rights and the voluntary pact on preventing and addressing sexual exploitation and abuse, promoted by the Secretary-General.

It is fundamental to implement Security Council resolutions outlining commitments and plans for the prevention of sexual violence in conflict and to monitor their implementation. Similarly, sexual violence in the context of armed conflict and terrorism must systematically become a criterion for being subject to sanctions, applied to all those who participate in the financing, planning, or support of armed groups with connections to acts of sexual violence. In order for that to be effective, key actors must collaborate. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General plays an important role in that regard, ensuring fluid communication and the exchange of information.

Prevention is key. The systematic inclusion of women protection advisers in the strategic planning processes of political missions and peace operations, as well as adequate gender training to help prevent and respond adequately to sexual exploitation and abuse, are essential. For all of that to be possible, programmes must be adequately funded.

It is essential that all such efforts focus on the victims. Support programmes should be established for the adequate reintegration of victims into their social structures, which should contribute to the re-establishment of the social fabric of populations suffering the consequences of armed conflicts. Legal frameworks should be established at the national level in order to protect victims and combat the stigma associated with sexual abuse and violence. These should contemplate reparations and compensation, taking into account that different forms of sexual violence require different solutions and responses.

Finally, it is essential to involve women and girls in decision-making processes and leadership positions. The lack of opportunities, the lack of national policies for their protection and inclusion, as well as structural barriers in all areas that promote discrimination against women perpetuate a cycle of poverty, exclusion and violence, thereby hampering their enjoyment of their rights. It is therefore critical to guarantee equal opportunities, access to education and women and girl's economic, political and social empowerment so that they can assume a vital and transformative role in their communities during and after conflicts, and can regain their dignity and enjoyment of their rights.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Czech Republic.

Mr. Ellinger (Czech Republic): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this important open debate.

The Czech Republic aligns itself with the statement made by the observer of the European Union.

I would like to thank Secretary-General António Guterres for his valuable report (S/2018/250) and strong commitment to implementing the agenda of preventing sexual violence in conflict and introducing new initiatives to make changes on the ground. I would also like to thank his Special Representative Pramila Patten for her extensive work and her dedication.

The Czech Republic is deeply concerned about the persistent occurrence of sexual and gender-based violence in reported countries. We should step up our efforts to put an end to the climate of impunity. Initiatives at a high political level should be translated into concrete actions in order to ensure that the concept of accountability is fully implemented on the ground.

The Czech Republic remains determined to help to combat sexual and gender-based violence in conflict and post-conflict countries. In partnership with non-governmental organizations, the Czech Republic is implementing projects aimed at preventing sexual violence and the abuse of women and girls, including by setting up health-care and hygiene centres for marginalized and abused girls and internally displaced persons in Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, Libya, South Sudan and Iraq, as well as in Pakistan, Jordan and Bangladesh.

We believe that the culture of violence is related to socioeconomic factors and arises where various groups are marginalized. The Czech Republic therefore addresses the root causes of inequalities in societies by implementing projects aimed at the economic empowerment of women and their equal participation in public and political affairs. Such projects are implemented in Georgia, Zambia, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

The report of the Secretary-General affirms that cases of sexual and gender-based violence remain underreported. The equal participation of women and men in law enforcement agencies creates an environment that is more conducive to reporting those serious crimes. The Czech Republic has therefore become a lead nation of the Jordan III Trust Fund — a capacity-building project to assist servicewomen in the Jordanian armed forces.

In January 2017, the Czech Republic adopted a national action plan on women and peace and security. The plan contains specific measurable tasks, including measures to combat conflict-related sexual violence, as well as all forms of violence and discrimination against women, girls, men and boys, as a violation of human rights. In 2015, the Czech Ministry of Defence adopted its own action plan to implement resolution 1325 (2000). In line with the United Nations zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse, such training is obligatory for peacekeepers before joining the United Nations or other international peacekeeping missions.

In terms of enforcing accountability, the Czech Republic continues to support the International Criminal Court and ad hoc international tribunals. The Czech Republic supports the global gender activities of UN-Women through regular voluntary financial contributions.

As a candidate country to the Human Rights Council in the elections this autumn, we remain committed to advancing the empowerment of women, gender equality and access to justice. Let me affirm that the Czech Republic remains strongly committed to preventing and to protecting women, girls, men and boys from falling victim to such terrible crimes.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Montenegro.

Ms. Pajević (Montenegro): I would like to thank the Peruvian presidency for organizing this timely open debate on preventing sexual violence in conflict through empowerment, gender equality and access to justice and for preparing an informative concept note (S/2018/311, annex). I also thank the briefers for their valuable inputs to the debate.

My country fully associates itself with the statements made by the observer of the European Union and by the representative of Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security. However, I would like to make some additional remarks in my national capacity.

We live in an increasingly divided world, torn by conflict and political breakdowns, where women and girls are at a heightened risk of all forms of gender-based violence, from rape to assault, domestic violence and early marriage, as well as exploitation by smugglers. Montenegro welcomes the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/250), which paints a disturbing picture concerning country situations. Today we need to consider which practical steps should be taken to meet our commitments, to protect women from the widespread occurrence of sexual violence in armed conflict by State and non-State actors, to promote the role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflict and to ensure the building of stable and just societies.

Preventing conflict-related sexual violence through empowerment, gender equality and justice is central to peacebuilding, conflict prevention and reconciliation. We must support the ability of women to influence policies that promote peacebuilding and development and reduce inequality. As experience shows, female experts can provide additional channels of communication to local communities that are not open to male soldiers. They help to build trust and confidence. They can attend to the specific needs of women and girls, including with regard to basic services, health care and education. Women's voices must be heard and women must have ownership of the policies that affect them and all of us.

Montenegro supports international efforts to implement resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security, which acknowledges the disproportionate impact of armed conflict on women and children. We adopted a national action plan for the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) for the period 2017-2018. We actively participate in the work of the Women, Peace and Security National Focal Points Network. In order to empower women soldiers, increase female representation and support the recruitment of female officers and gender training, last year Montenegro contributed to the NATO Jordan III Trust Fund. We will soon send an experienced gender adviser, responsible for advice and operational support on the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000), to NATO headquarters.

Montenegro was among the first five countries signatories to the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. We submitted the first report on its implementation last year. We support the European Union Spotlight Initiative to end violence against women and girls, which was launched in September last year and is being implemented worldwide with the United Nations.

It is unacceptable for crimes of sexual violence not to be reported and condemned and for those responsible not be held accountable. The United Nations, other international bodies, Governments and civil society must all play their part in ensuring a response so as to eliminate sexual violence in conflict areas around the world.

We support international peace operations as an instrument to ensure respect for human rights and to build sustainable institutions in conflict areas. Nowadays, United Nations peacekeeping operations are more focused on protecting civilians than on monitoring ceasefires. That is why peace operations should use new technology to strengthen their capacity. In preparing Montenegrin soldiers to take part in peace operations and activities, our Ministry of Defence conducts regular training sessions on preventing sexual violence in conflict.

Montenegro strongly condemns cases of sexual exploitation in United Nations peacekeeping operations, as that criminal activity and abuse have no place under any circumstances in a United Nations flagship activity. Zero tolerance and zero impunity must prevail as our only option in order not to tarnish the credibility of the United Nations.

At the international level, the Security Council has an important role to play, including through the sanctions regime. We call on the Security Council to explicitly include sexual violence as a designation criterion within the United Nations sanctions regimes where such crimes are persistently perpetrated.

Survivors of sexual violence must receive adequate support in order to alleviate their suffering and to assist their reintegration into communities without prejudice or stigma, which requires education and engagement.

We need to redouble our efforts to prevent conflict-related sexual violence through the empowerment of women and by supporting gender equality and justice at all levels. No perpetrator should be above the law and no survivor should be neglected.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Qassem Agha (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): The Syrian Government has worked hard to strengthen its cooperation and coordination with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, so that the Special Representative can successfully carry out her noble work, correct factual information, and refute all allegations by media propaganda supporting the Saudi-Qatari terrorist aggression against my country. This aggression continues to cause Syrian bloodshed as a result of unilateral measures that run counter to the basic rules of international law and are adopted by some members of the Council and beyond against the Syrian Government for purely political purposes.

The Syrian Government hosted the former Special Representative of the Secretary-General in 2015. We provided her with access to all facilities, including corrections and rehabilitation centres. We also gave her the opportunity to meet with many women prisoners who had committed the crimes of terrorism, theft and murder, in violation of Syrian law, so that she could fully carry out her mandate.

We have read with interest the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/250), introduced by Ms. Pramila Patten. We have noticed an improvement in the approach of the report to Syrian women suffering from sexual violence. The report refers to the fruitful cooperation between the Syrian Government and the Office of the Special Representative, especially with respect to enhancing shelter facilities and transportation services in rural areas. In 2017 we established a family protection centre, in cooperation and coordination with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour and the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs and Population, in order to enhance our response to the victims of sexual violence and provide them with care and psychological support. In that context, allow us to provide the following observations.

First, the Government of my country completely rejects the allegations in the report that the Syrian Government practices sexual violence. We are surprised that the Special Representative would rely on fabricated reports prepared by the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Those Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011. The Mechanism relies on information gathered from open sources as well as armed and terrorist groups, notably the so-called White Helmets, and does not verify the sources of that information or its credibility.

Ms. Patten should have relied on her Office and coordinated with the Syrian Government to carrying out her own investigations in that regard, instead of relying on those fabricated reports. We find it strange that the Special Representative would go beyond her mandate on conflict-related sexual violence and speak in her very brief report on the participation of Syrian women in political life. She also promoted General Assembly resolution 71/248, which was not adopted by consensus. That constitutes in and of itself an egregious departure from her mandate.

Secondly, the report does not discuss the suffering of Syrian women and girls in refugee camps in neighbouring countries, and this is an essential matter. In that regard, allow us to express our deep concern and pain over the ongoing instances of rape of women and children and the phenomenon of human trafficking, sexual harassment and organ trafficking in Turkish camps, and forced marriage in Jordanian camps, and the sexual exploitation of hundreds of Syrian women by humanitarian workers from international organizations working in those camps. This is happening before the eyes of the entire world.

Thirdly, the report completely ignores the suffering of Syrian women in the occupied Syrian Golan and the Palestinian occupied territories. It also fails to describe the suffering of Syrian women subjected to the worst violations of human rights and marginalization policies. The Israeli occupation authorities continue to prevent Syrian mothers in the occupied Golan from visiting their children and relatives in Syria. In addition, the Israeli occupation provides endless support to the terrorists of the Al-Nusra Front, which practices the worst forms of sexual violence in areas under its control.

In conclusion, I would like to underscore that Syria remains committed to supporting international efforts to end all forms of sexual violence, punishing their perpetrators and instigators and breaking the silence and unjustified disregard.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I give the floor to the representative of Bahrain.

Mr. Alrowaiei (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for having organized this important debate. I also want to thank Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Ms. Pramila Patten, for their valuable briefings this morning. We would also thank Ms. Razia Sultana, who spoke on behalf of the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security. We welcome the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/250).

Sexual violence in armed conflict is now one of the most serious dangers facing our societies. It is also a factor of forced displacement and migration that the world is witnessing. Sexual crimes against women are beyond imagination. They have become a weapon of war.

The Kingdom of Bahrain calls for efforts to counter the stigmatization of victims of sexual violence by providing them with the necessary support for their socioeconomic reintegration, which is essential to protecting the social fabric of post-conflict countries. We also call for strengthened efforts in the area of prevention, early warning and rapid reaction. For these reasons, the Kingdom of Bahrain decided to join the Women, Peace and Security Focal Points Network. Bahraini women live in a safe and stable country and are represented in the Supreme Council for Women. They provide support services to women in brethren countries in armed conflict. The Kingdom of Bahrain continues to denounce in the strongest terms barbaric acts of sexual violence and calls for the prosecution of their perpetrators.

At the international level, the Kingdom of Bahrain is one of the first countries to sign and ratify a significant number of relevant international instruments, in particular the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

At the national level, the Kingdom of Bahrain has enacted national legislation based on international instruments, such as a law against trafficking in persons, laws establishing the National Institute for Human Rights and the National Commission for International Humanitarian Law, and a law for protection against domestic violence. The Kingdom of Bahrain is eager to participate in relevant international forums, voice its opinion and follow up on results. Bahraini women have participated in many local initiatives and international forums seeking to activate the role of women in achieving sustainable peace.

In the context of follow up and implementation of the Kingdom's international commitments pursuant to the conventions and treaties adhered to, many national committees have been established, most importantly the Committee to Follow Up on Implementing the Security Council Resolutions, the High Coordination Committee for Human Rights, the National Committee for Combatting Human Trafficking and the High Committee for the International Humanitarian Law.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I give the floor to the representative of Morocco.

Ms. Moutchou (Morocco) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, my delegation wishes to thank the Peruvian presidency for organizing an open debate on this topic, the significance of which is seen in its urgency, acuity and impact on societies. This debate is timely, as the proliferation of sexual violence in conflict concerns us all, making the need for joint action more urgent than ever.

Violence has always been reprehensible, regardless of who are the victims. However, sexual violence in times of conflict is even more so. Unfortunately, this violence persists. It has become systematic, widespread and appallingly brutal. No woman, girl, man, boy or old person is spared — not even infants. We strongly condemn these practices from another era, which continue to this day. Our debate today is a strong and eloquent illustration of this condemnation.

Sexual violence not only affects victims; it gnaws at and wears down communities and societies in their entirety. It seeks to wound the body, mutilate dignity, destroy the social fabric, destabilize, ruin and terrorize societies affected by conflict, and nips any effort at reconciliation and reconstruction in the bud.

In June, we will celebrate the tenth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1820 (2008), which in paragraph 4 stresses that

> "rape and other forms of sexual violence can constitute a war crime, a crime against humanity, or a constitutive act with respect to genocide".

Faced with the persistence of these heinous acts, indignation is no longer enough. Action must be taken and real solutions proposed to help survivors rebuild. Effective measures to prevent and respond to acts of sexual violence can contribute greatly to the maintenance of international peace and security. In this regard, allow me to highlight the following few points.

First, the root causes of conflict-related sexual violence must be addressed, promoting peacebuilding and sustainable human development and encouraging national efforts to end gender-based discrimination.

Secondly, access to justice for victims must be strengthened, and impunity must be combated by bringing the perpetrators and those responsible for sexual violence to justice.

Thirdly, the participation of women in discussions on conflict prevention and resolution, the maintenance of peace and security and post-conflict peacebuilding must be facilitated, and the empowerment of women and their full and equal participation in decision-making must be supported.

Fourthly, religious leaders have an influential role to play in combating the abuse of religion to justify violence. They must be encouraged to speak out strongly, firmly and quickly against violence.

Fifthly, cooperation with local actors and community leaders is crucial, as they can identify precursor signs of acts of sexual violence, provide early-warning systems and propose appropriate prevention and protection strategies.

Sixthly, the stigma surrounding victims of sexual violence and children born of sexual violence must be reverse. These victims must be accompanied medically and reintegrated socially and economically.

I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the Secretary-General, the penholder of the United Nations strategy to combat sexual exploitation and abuse, which gives priority to the rights and dignity of victims and calls for the implementation of the zero-tolerance policy. The Kingdom of Morocco fully and firmly supports this policy of zero tolerance and works tirelessly, taking all measures necessary to eradicate these despicable acts. We are confident that this strategy should change the game. My country, which is a member of the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security, chaired by Canada, and of the Group of Friends for Gender Parity, led by Colombia, supports their international commitments to combatting all forms of sexual violence.

In conclusion, protection, prevention and the fight against impunity must be the watchwords of our societies. International law, including international humanitarian law, must be applied without concession. It is our responsibility to prevent sexual violence, protect individuals, respond to the needs of victims, and ensure that perpetrators are held fully accountable. It is high time to invest in peace, promote human and sustainable development, restore dignity to the victims and make the project of rebuilding societies and perpetuating peace a reality, so that no one is left behind. That has been our responsibility since we adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. That is our responsibility and our duty.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Mali.

Mr. Konfourou (Mali) (*spoke in French*): I have the great honour and privilege to speak on behalf of the member countries of the Human Security Network, an intercontinental network comprising Austria, Chile, Costa Rica, Greece, Ireland, Jordan, Norway, Panama, Slovenia, Switzerland, Thailand, South Africa as an observer country, and, of course, my own country, Mali. The Human Security Network is an informal group of States that is working to promote the integration of the human security dimension into policies and programmes at the national, regional and international levels.

On behalf of the Network's member States, I extend our warm congratulations to the Peruvian presidency of the Council on having organized today's open debate on preventing sexual violence in conflict through capacity-building, gender equality and access to justice. I also thank the various briefers.

The Human Security Network welcomes the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/250) and notes with deep concern the continued use of sexual violence as strategies of war, terrorism, torture and repression, as reflected in the report of the Secretary-General. We are deeply concerned by this sexual violence, whose victims continued to be targeted in 2017 because of their religious, ethnic or clan affiliation. It is more necessary than ever for the United Nations to work closely with Governments in order to prevent and investigate such crimes and to provide specialized services to victims, their families and witnesses.

It should also be borne in mind that sexual violence generally continues even after a conflict has ended. It is a factor that increases insecurity in affected areas. Victims of both genders are often deprived of protection and access to justice. And the effects of sexual violence can extend over many years and generations. Worse, these crimes are often amnestied. The topic of sexual violence in conflict or post-conflict situations is considered taboo, and its victims are usually punished and stigmatized, while the perpetrators remain at large. The Human Security Network therefore joins today's appeals and calls on the Security Council and Member States to redouble their efforts, particularly in the fight against impunity.

We must recognize the essential role of international criminal justice, in particular that of the International Criminal Court, in deciding cases of sexual violence in conflict situations. I recall that the Rome Statute — and this was a great step forward — recognized sexual violence as a war crime and a crime against humanity. In this regard, we welcome the 2017 judgment of the International Criminal Court in the case of *Prosecutor v. Bosco Ntaganda*, confirming that such crimes fall within the jurisdiction of the Court, and that rape and sexual slavery of children by members of armed groups can be prosecuted as war crimes under the Rome Statute. However, we wish once again to recall that the primary responsibility for prosecuting perpetrators or those responsible lies with States.

Sexual violence in conflict situations is recognized as a pillar of security challenges. At a time when women and girls are often the first targets, men and boys are also strategically targeted. While it is essential that we maintain momentum in the fight against sexual violence, it is also important to stress the importance of building women's capacities as part of the solution. Building women's capacities and increasing their participation in decision-making bodies remains the cornerstone of any response in the areas of prevention and protection.

The full enjoyment of human rights has been a priority of the Human Security Network since its inception. The protection and promotion of rights are a shared responsibility and can be achieved with the firm commitment and action of the United Nations, Member States and other actors. The Human Security Network also stresses the importance of focusing on the prevention of future violations and rehabilitating and reintegrating those affected by those heinous crimes through appropriate medical and psychological care. In that regard, we commend the appointment of the Victims' Rights Advocate, Ms. Jane Connors.

The States members of the Human Security Network express strong support for the zero-tolerance policy on sexual abuse and exploitation, and consequently, a zero-impunity approach for all civilian staff, troops and police of the United Nations and other international peacekeeping operations, in accordance with the Secretary-General's requests.

Finally, the Human Security Network calls on the Security Council and Member States to take into account the recommendations of the report of the Secretary-General in their efforts to prevent and combat sexual violence in conflict.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Maldives.

Mr. Mohamed (Maldives): I wish to thank the Government of Peru, in its capacity as President of the Security Council for the month of April, for convening this important open debate.

Ten years ago, the Council adopted resolution 1820 (2008), which recognized that sexual violence was being used as a tactic of war and could therefore be included in the category of war crimes. Today's open debate provides an opportunity to reflect on the progress made and evaluate the way forward in implementing the Council's resolutions that aim at preventing sexual violence in armed conflict and post-conflict situations.

The Maldives strongly condemns how sexual violence is being weaponized by targeting victims based on ethnic, religious or political affiliation, which destroys social cohesion, leading to forced displacement and the deprivation of economic resources. We note with concern that the failure to address those issues has led to desperate recourse to more harmful practices, including child marriage, withdrawal from educational and employment opportunities, and resort to commercial sexual exploitation.

We are pleased to note that progress has been made in a number of countries. We must ensure that this progress is based on evidence about the reality of the situation on the ground. Ensuring that all cases of sexual violence are reported is crucial in strengthening justice mechanisms and accountability. Unfortunately, the majority of those cases remain unreported owing to social stigma often attached to the victims of the crime, fear of reprisals and the systematic barriers and obstacles that the victims have to overcome. Increased awareness about the nature of the crime, changes in perceptions of social taboos and having an efficient and reliable framework to identify sexual exploitation are necessary to establish the first step towards ending impunity and ensuring accountability.

We also note that there are commonalities in the recommendations for those countries, including strengthening legal frameworks, the provision of access to justice, socioeconomic support for victims, strict screening and training of armed and security forces, and strengthening frameworks to enhance cooperation with the United Nations to ensure prevention and response measures.

Most of the victims are women and girls from marginalized rural communities who do not always benefit from full legal protections and often face cultural taboos regarding sexual violence. Therefore, Member States should not only strive to extend the reach of the rule of law to all communities, but also ensure that the law itself provides protection to the victims through alignment with international human rights standards on sexual violence and abuse. We believe that the greater representation of women in governance, especially on the part of women from rural communities, would raise the profile of those issues and facilitate positive change. In addition, we also support community mobilization campaigns, led by community and religious leaders, aimed at shifting the stigma of sexual violence from the victims to the perpetrators.

We wish to underscore the responsibilities of armed forces and peacekeeping operations in preventing sexual violence in conflict. It is important not only to ensure training in international humanitarian and human rights law in the specific context of sexual exploitation, but also to establish strict monitoring and accountability within those systems in order to prevent abuse by those actors themselves. In that regard, we are pleased to note that United Nations peacekeeping operations with mandates on the protection of civilians have established monitoring arrangements and incorporated early warning indicators of conflict-related sexual violence.

The Maldives supports the Secretary-General's preventative approach and believes that early warning indicators should help prevent sexual violence in conflict-prone areas, in addition to post-conflict situations, and that this should be factored in when evaluating risks to peace and security in the Council. In that regard, we wish to emphasize the importance of ensuring adequate funding for sexual violence programmes in conflict-affected situations.

It is clear that sexual exploitation and abuse are not just a consequence of conflict, but can also be a weapon that exacerbates conflicts. Addressing the root causes and ending impunity is the key to ensuring that this heinous crime is brought to an end. We all need to work together to find shared solutions to ensure that all women, men, girls and boys whose lives are already tarnished with conflict are not permanently scarred by the consequences of sexual violence.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Argentina.

Mr. Verdier (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): Argentina aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Canada on behalf of the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security. We would like to share with the Council the following considerations in our national capacity.

First of all, I would like to thank the Government of Peru for taking the initiative of organizing this debate and for presiding over it throughout the day. We also thank the Deputy Secretary-General and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict for their briefings, and Ms. Razia Sultana for her courageous testimony on behalf of the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security.

Argentina continues to strongly support the efforts of the Secretary-General and the Office of the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict. We also thank the Secretary-General for his most recent report (S/2018/250), and we fully endorse its recommendations aimed at preventing, combating and eliminating all forms of sexual violence in armed conflicts, with a special focus on addressing issues related to prevention, early warning, contributing factors and rapid responses in the face of the occurrence of such crimes.

Sexual violence in conflict is one of the most horrific and abhorrent violations of human dignity, and poses a singular and undeniable threat to international peace and security. We must therefore redouble our commitment to prevention, eradication and accountability with regard to such crimes. We must put the victims of such crimes at the heart of our actions and pool our efforts to address the structural and underlying conditions that increase the victims' vulnerability and risk.

The growing use and threat of sexual violence perpetrated by various State and non-State armed actors and groups against specific groups — women, children, minorities, people who have or are perceived as having a sexual orientation or gender identity other than that of the norm, among others — constitute the most serious international crimes and must be prevented and punished in strict compliance with the law by making use of available tools and mechanisms, including the sanctions regimes of the Council.

Preventing and combating sexual violence in conflict should be at the forefront of all prevention, peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts undertaken by the United Nations and by the international community, as a whole. One of the key ways to prevent the scourge is to address the risks and underlying factors that make women and certain groups particularly vulnerable to sexual violence. Such factors include, inter alia, structural discrimination, gender-based violence and a climate of insecurity and impunity. Efforts and initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, in all their diversity, are also important.

With regard to access to justice and accountability for crimes of sexual violence, it is crucial to build documentation and investigation capacity and foster greater cooperation, information-sharing and good practices in the areas of investigation, documentation, location, assistance for the victims, extradition and legal aid in order to end the climate of impunity that contributes to the proliferation of such crimes.

With regard to crimes of sexual violence, we reiterate that victims must be at the core of our prevention, eradication and accountability efforts. It is therefore essential to protect, assist and reintegrate all victims of such violations by working with women's organizations and other civil society organizations to provide services, aid and gender-inclusive multisectoral and multidisciplinary support and compensation, meet needs and protect the dignity and human rights of the victims.

Those elements must be taken into consideration when designing the mandates of peacekeeping operations, special political and peacebuilding missions, pursuant to resolution 1325 (2000). The goal is to ensure the inclusion of women in equal conditions and their access to significant decision-making positions so as to secure their seats at the negotiating table. We must ensure that experts on gender, gender-based violence and sexual violence are included in the various United Nations missions and mediation teams. We must also include specific provisions and commitments when brokering peace agreements and ceasefires and ensure that more women participate in peacekeeping forces.

We believe that the development of national plans to implement resolution 1325 (2000) must be viewed as a tool for building peace and preventing sexual violence in all areas. That spirit encouraged our country to join the Women, Peace and Security Focal Points Network and the Group of Friends on Women, Peace and Security in Geneva. It also joined the Elsie Initiative on Women in Peace Operations, spearheaded by Canada, which aims to increase the number of women in peacekeeping operations.

Preventing sexual violence in conflict must begin by building more peaceful societies. That can be achieved only through equality. In keeping with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, we can leave no one behind. There is no peace without inclusion or justice. Societies with a climate of impunity perpetuate violence. Argentina takes a comprehensive view of peace in which gender equity and equality permeate all public policy. It works to achieve social transformation geared towards gender equality, which is a sine qua non for strengthening democracy. Our priority for gender policy is the elimination of violence against women. In that regard, gender reforms have been implemented in the defence and security sector.

Argentina reiterates its commitment to the Organization's zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse, as well as its support for the measures adopted by the Secretary-General on the issue. Argentina, together with 80 countries, signed the voluntary compact on preventing and addressing sexual exploitation and abuse.

In conclusion, I would like to recall that General Assembly resolution 69/293 designates 19 June as the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict. We encourage all Member States, entities of the United Nations system and other international and regional organizations, as well as civil society and other relevant actors, to participate in the activities to mark the Day.

The meeting rose at 6.15 p.m.